

TRIBUTE TO OPERATION FIRST CHOICE

HON. JOHN SHIMKUS

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, June 19, 2000

Mr. SHIMKUS. Mr. Speaker, I rise before you today to recognize "Operation First Choice". This group of Mt. Vernon, IL, residents recently received the "Make a Difference Day" Award sponsored by USA Weekend magazine.

They are a volunteer group set in place to offer area kids a chance at excelling in various activities, helping many who might be considered at-risk off the streets and out of trouble. The group consists of the Police Athletic League, Young Marines, and others.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the volunteers of "Operation First Choice" for their commitment to serving as positive role models. They truly are making a difference every day in the lives of the kids of Mt. Vernon and Jefferson County.

LEROY COLLINS: HERO OF THE STRUGGLE

HON. JOHN LEWIS

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, June 19, 2000

Mr. LEWIS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, the Civil Rights Movement is replete with examples of men and women who risked great personal harm and displayed unwavering courage in the face of danger. Men and women whose names many not be as familiar to us as the names of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. or James Farmer, but who nevertheless made huge contributions to the struggle for freedom. One such person was LeRoy Collins, former governor of Florida, whose mediation skills and nonviolent nature helped Alabama avoid a second Bloody Sunday.

As we all know, the first attempt by marches to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge on that fateful day—March 7, 1965, Bloody Sunday—was met with unconscionable violence initiated by Alabama state troopers. As plans were made for the second attempt, many expected the worst. Dr. King, who would lead the march, met with LeRoy Collins. Collins was the director of the Justice Department's Community Relations Service and was sent by President Johnson to mediate the situation. After speaking with King, Collins struck a deal with state and local officials designed to avoid a repeat of Bloody Sunday. We would be allowed to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge but we could not go on to Montgomery.

Later that day, with Alabama State troopers looking on, two thousand people led by Dr. King peacefully marched across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Once they reached the bottom of the other side they stopped, prayed and sang "We Shall Overcome."

The nonviolent nature of our second march was in no small measure a result of LeRoy Collins' courage and prudence. God only knows what harm may have been suffered on

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

that day if a deal had not been brokered. I will never forget LeRoy Collins. He is truly a hero of the struggle.

THE UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

HON. WILLIAM D. DELAHUNT

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, June 19, 2000

Mr. DELAHUNT. Mr. Speaker, where I come from, generations of otherwise well-adjusted people have suffered the ill effects of the well-known "Curse of the Bambino." Since the Red Sox traded Babe Ruth, life has never quite been the same, although I am one of those with deep, quite faith that the Curse of the Bambino officially expires as we enter the new millennium.

But I would like to discuss with you a different kind of curse. Call it the "Curse of the Can-Do". This curse afflicts the United States Coast Guard, and its long, proud tradition of never turning down a call for help. Of never shirking new responsibility. Even when the gas tank is literally on empty.

It's too late for the Red Sox to get Babe Ruth back. But we still have an opportunity to ensure the readiness of the Coast Guard to discharge its lifesaving mission. I take the House floor tonight to thank my colleagues who in the last few days have helped lead us in that direction—but also to warn that we're still sailing into a very stiff wind.

Last month, this House took historic steps to shore up Coast Guard resources to save lives, prevent pollution, fight drugs, help the economy, respond to natural disasters, and enhance national security. It's up to us to see these efforts through.

The FY2000 Transportation Department appropriations bill passed recently by the full House would reverse more than a decade of chronic underfunding that has made it nearly impossible for the Coast Guard to do the work the Congress has assigned it. For the first time in recent memory, there is now genuine hope that we can adequately safeguard the lives and livelihoods of those who live and work on or near the water.

From the small harbors of New England to the ice floes of Alaska; from the Great Lakes to the Gulf Coast to the banks of the Mississippi; I commend Chairman YOUNG and Ranking Member OBEY of the Appropriations Committee, and Chairman WOLF and Ranking Member SABO of the Transportation Subcommittee.

Their leadership has underscored the stark fact that the demands on the Coast Guard has vastly outpaced its resources. That there is no longer margin for error. And that the consequences of any such error is literally a life-and-death matter.

Despite the fact that there are no more Coast Guard personnel today than there were in 1967, it is indisputable that—day in and day out—no public agency works harder. Or smarter.

During the 1990s, the Coast Guard reduced its workforce by nearly 10 percent—and operated within a budget that rose by only one

percent in actual dollars. Over this period, it also has responded to a half-million SOS calls, an average of 65,000 each year—and in the process, has saved 50,000 lives. Every year, the Coast Guard performs 40,000 inspections of U.S. and foreign merchant vessels; ensures the safe passage of a million commercial vessels through our ports and waterways; responds to 13,000 reports of water pollution; inspects a thousand offshore drilling platforms, conducts 12,000 fisheries enforcement boardings, and prevents 100,000 pounds of cocaine from reaching America's shores.

Two centuries of experience have taught us to rely on the professionalism, judgment, compassion, commitment and courage of the U.S. Coast Guard. From hurricanes to airplane crashes, from drug smugglers to foreign factory trawlers, the Coast Guard is always on call—just as it has been for 200 years.

We have learned to trust the Coast Guard with all we hold dear—our property, our natural resources and our lives. In Washington, a long way from the winds and the whitecaps, it has been tempting to task the Coast Guard with new and burdensome missions. Far too tempting.

Historically, the Coast Guard has discharged whatever duties it was assigned. As a Service originally created in 1790 to regulate maritime duties, its responsibilities have—appropriately—grown with the changing needs and technology of the times.

As co-chair of the House Coast Guard Caucus, along with Representatives HOWARD COBLE and GENE TAYLOR, I have had grave doubts for a long time.

Most recently, much has been made of the demands on the Coast Guard for work in the area of illegal drug interdiction. As a former prosecutor, I'm all for fighting the drug war and have fully supported calling upon the Coast Guard to step up its interdiction efforts—but not at the expense of its core mission, the saving of human life.

We can't just wish away the costs, and I'm not ready to start treating search-and-rescue like a luxury we can do without—any more than you can move cops off the beat, then complain about street crime.

We have stretched the Coast Guard so thin for so long that it can barely be expected to fulfill its credo, Semper Paratus—"always prepared". And there are scores of new missions in the wings.

This year, the Coast Guard was the only federal agency to earn an "A" from the independent Government Performance Project for operating with unusual efficiency and effectiveness. That assessment placed the Coast Guard at the very top of 20 Executive Branch agencies because its "top-notch planning and performance budgeting overcame short staffing and fraying equipment."

It all came down, they concluded, to that Curse of Can-Do. "The Coast Guard," they said, "is a CAN-DO organization whose 'CAN' is dwindling while its 'DO' is growing".

This can't continue. Not when the average age of its deepwater cutters is 27 years old, making this force the second oldest major naval fleet on the globe. Not when fixed-wing aircraft deployments have more than doubled, and helicopter deployments are up more than 25 percent—without any increase in the number of aircraft, pilots or crews.