

The criminalization of slander, libel or defamation, as well as laws which purport to protect public officials or bodies from "insult," is a longstanding concern of Members of the Helsinki Commission. In fact, I have repeatedly raised concern about the use—or, more correctly—abuse of such laws. Most recently, at Commission hearings in September and October, I expressed concern about the use of such laws in the current crackdown on independent media in Azerbaijan. In November, "Insult laws" were again used as an excuse to close an independent paper in Azerbaijan. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, as an elected politician, I get "insulted" every day of the week—and twice on Sunday. It's part of the job.

I am not alone in my views. At OSCE meetings, the United States has repeatedly called for such laws to be repealed. Similarly, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, and the Organization of American States Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression issued a joint statement in February 2000 which concluded that "criminal defamation laws should be abolished."

Simply put, Mr. Speaker, Slovakia's current criminal defamation law—a holdover from a bygone era—is not consistent with the international commitments and obligations it has undertaken as a free and independent state. I am particularly concerned that journalist Alex Kratky has been charged with a criminal offense for criticizing a speech delivered by Slovak President Schuster. If found guilty, Kratky faces two years in prison for his opinions.

Unfortunately, the Galbavy amendment was defeated by the narrowest of margins, failing by just one vote. Although Deputy Speaker Pavol Hrusovksy voted in favor of the amendment, most of the other parliamentary leaders either abstained or did not participate in the vote. The Slovak Parliament came so close to doing the right thing, so close to demonstrating the kind of regional leadership so desperately needed, but stopped short by one vote.

I know the Slovak Parliament has a great deal of work before it now, and I particularly appreciate the work of the Parliament and the Government in supporting the war on terrorism and their efforts to ensure that U.N. Security Council Resolution 1373 is fully implemented. At the same time, I believe that there are still opportunities for Slovakia to act on the important human rights issue of criminal defamation.

First, the Constitutional Court could declare the provisions of Articles 102, 103 and 206 unconstitutional—especially bearing in mind, as Deputy Minister Lubomir Fogas has noted, Slovakia's Constitution gives priority to Slovakia's international human rights obligations. I hope, however, that Slovakia's elected leaders will not wait for the court to act, since that can take a long time. Instead the initiative could be reconsidered and, with a few more Deputies voting to repeal defamation and libel from the criminal code, Slovakia would set an example for other countries to emulate.

IN SUPPORT OF MEGAN SMITH,
2002 WINTER OLYMPICS TORCH
RUNNER FOR THE SIXTH CON-
GRESSIONAL DISTRICT

HON. NANCY L. JOHNSON

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 6, 2001

Mrs. JOHNSON of Connecticut. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Megan Smith, an outstanding young citizen from my home town of New Britain, Connecticut. Megan is an excellent student, exceptional athlete and is highly esteemed by her peers for her positive attitude, considerate nature and high standards. For possessing these characteristics, Megan has been given the great honor of being selected as a 2002 Winter Olympics Torch Runner for my district.

Her accomplishments speak for themselves. Megan is ranked in the top five percent of her class, and deftly balances this commitment to her studies with an equally strong commitment to her athletics. She is a top player on her school's volleyball and basketball teams, and has already been accepted to Quinnipiac University in Hamden, Connecticut, on a full basketball scholarship beginning next fall.

Despite her rigorous schedule, Megan devotes many hours to performing community service work. She divides her time between Gaffney School's special education preschool program; St. Francis Middle School's basketball activities; and at tryouts and practices for the Connecticut Starters 10 National Team. Because of Megan's leadership, scholarship, character and service to her community, she was inducted into New Britain High School's Chapter of the National Honor Society and also was designated the female recipient of the Wendy's High School Heisman Scholar Athlete Award.

I cannot think of a better person to represent the Sixth Congressional District during the Olympic Torch run. Megan is an exemplary young woman whose giving heart and extraordinary talents will bring her much success. I salute Megan Smith for her invaluable contributions to her school and to her community. Congratulations.

REPRESENTATIVE GEORGE MILLER PRESENTS WWII VETERAN NICK COMINOS WITH MEDAL OF HONOR

HON. GEORGE MILLER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 6, 2001

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, I had the honor of joining the family and friends of WWII Veteran Nick Cominos in a ceremony to present several medals on Saturday, December 1, 2001, just days before the 60th anniversary of Pearl Harbor. These medals are a long-overdue recognition of his heroic efforts in the Dalmation Islands and Greece as part of a covert reconnaissance operation that led to the retreat of the Nazis from the area in 1944.

Federal military decorations are awarded to members of the armed forces exhibiting valor and self-sacrifice, the heroic acts of Mr. Nick Cominos are worthy of such an honor.

Almost 58 years ago, on Christmas Eve Nick Cominos and his Company boarded the liberty ship, *Pierre L'enfant*, to join a large convoy to the Atlantic. Thirty-one days later Cominos' Company landed on the only one of the Dalmation Islands in Adriatic Sea not occupied by the Nazis, the Island of Vis.

From their base on the Island of Vis, Company C raided the Nazi occupied Island of Solta. Within two days, Company C and their allies had captured the island. This was not without a cost. Company C lost one man and six others were wounded, including Nick Cominos.

After recuperating and returning to Vis, in August of 1944, Mr. Cominos and his Company C were deployed to Greece where they parachuted behind enemy lines and conducted covert reconnaissance missions to disrupt the German occupation of Greece. The Nazis retreated from Greece in November of 1944, at which time the Greek/American Operational Group was disbanded.

The type of covert ground operations first used by Mr. Cominos and the men of Company C, 2671st Reconnaissance Battalion of the Office of Strategic Services are now being used to help fight the war against terrorism in Afghanistan.

Mr. Cominos and other World War II veterans have received numerous medals commemorating their service to this country during the war. However, because the records of the Office of Strategic Service were classified until 1988, the individual acts of bravery of Mr. Cominos and Company C have not been officially recognized.

Friday, December 7, 2001 is the 60th anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Many have drawn parallels between the terrorists attacks of September 11th and Pearl Harbor.

We have a living parallel. A WWII veteran and his Company who pioneered the types of special covert operations which are helping to bring closure to the tragic events of September 11.

In a time of national emergency, when we are once again engaged in military operations on foreign soil in an international effort to defend freedom, it is important to praise those who have served our country so courageously in the past and whose actions make them role models for our troops in Afghanistan and in future military efforts.

It is my honor to publicly recognize Mr. Nick Cominos for his acts of courage, heroism, and sacrifice in WWII.

PAYING TRIBUTE TO CADET
PATRICK HUX

HON. SCOTT McINNIS

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 6, 2001

Mr. McINNIS. Mr. Speaker, it is with a solemn heart that I would like to take this opportunity and pay tribute to a young man whose life was taken during his service to protect others. Cadet Patrick Hux, of the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado passed