A CONSTITUENT'S VIEWS ON THE FLAG DESECRATION AMENDMENT

HON. JOSÉ E. SERRANO

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, July 21, 1995

Mr. SERRANO. Mr. Speaker, I recently received a letter from a constituent, Mr. Geoffrey Graham of the Bronx. Mr. Graham thanked me for my vote against the proposed constitutional amendment to permit Congress and the States to prohibit the physical desecration of the U.S. flag. He also enclosed an essay expressing his views on this issue in more detail, which I thought was very eloquent. I commend this essay to my colleagues, and hope that each and every one will read it carefully and think again about the messages this amendment to our Constitution would send to residents of the United States and to the rest of the world.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Graham's essay follows:

WHY I OPPOSE THE FLAG DESECRATION AMENDMENT

There are three reasons to oppose the Constitutional amendment that would ''protect'' the flag.

The most important is that it will bring a small measure of fear into the lives of ordinary Americans. There are countries where people live in deep fear of their own government and institutions. Russia is a particularly tragic example, but there are many others. The contrast in quality of life between such countries and our own is so stark that any change in that direction should be viewed with apprehension.

Now, the friendly and familiar American flag, always a welcome presence, is being transformed into something that must be handled warily. It will have to be kept from young children and boisterous drunks, lest a felony occur. Unruly adolescents will have to be taught that disrespect for this object, unlike disrespect for the family bible or Crucifix, can bring severe punishment from outside the family. Idealistic teenagers, who sometimes believe in the First Amendment with almost religious fervor, will have to learn that the flag is an exception that could get them into very serious and long-lasting trouble. Housewives who are tempted to wash a soiled flag along with the regular laundry will have to remember that they had better not. We will have become a nation that is slightly afraid of its own flag.

A second reason is that it will undercut our efforts to help dissenters around the world who are being punished for violating some holy symbol. Sometimes, polite verbal protest is not enough. Most of us could sympathize with women in Islamic fundamentalist countries who might burn their veil or even a copy of the Koran. Of with women in poor Catholic countries, where the church has great influence, who might publicly destroy a Bible of crucific in anger over the church's position on birth control. Or with inhabitants of the former U.S.S.R. or Rhodesia if they burned their hated internal passports. Or with Chinese dissidents who, following the Tienanmen Square massacre, might direct a bitter symbolic protest at China's leader Deng Xiaoping (the act is to publicly break a small bottle, a ''xiao ping''). Our efforts to shield such dissenters have been moderately successful; but in the future, they will be weakened by the taint of hypocrisy. Indeed if disrespect for an icon is the important thing, rather than the form which the disrespect takes, it will be hard for us to reproach the Iranian government for its treatment of writers like Salman Rushdie.

The third reason is that the amendment will vandalize something much more important than the flag, our Constitution which includes the Bill of Rights. The Constitution is based on an unusual principle of government: an agreement to strictly limit the ability of any group to use the machinery of government against those of whom it disapproves. To that end, it guarantees freedom of expression without concessions to powerful political interests. In particular, it provides that expressions of discontent must be harmful, rather than merely convey and offensive idea, in order to be forbidden. Now we are abrogating that principle in return for the shallowest of satisfaction.

The Constitution, not the flag, has made us the great nation that we often are. It is admired around the world, and has been imitated countless times. Along with the Magna Carta and the Geneva and Hague Conventions, it is a landmark in the human effort to treat each other with decency. It is one of the greatest secular documents ever written, but its greatness derives from the fact that we usually live up to its guiding philosophy. It deserves better than this.

There is still time for the American public to give this proposed amendment the careful scrutiny it deserves. We should.

TRIBUTE TO PARTICIPANTS OF THE SUMMER INITIATIVE ''POLICE AND COMMUNITY TOGETHER STOP THE VIOLENCE'' RALLY/CONCERT

HON. NYDIA M. VELÁZQUEZ

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, July 21, 1995

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Mr. Speaker, it pleases me to acknowledge the efforts and accomplishments of the Cypress Hills and East New York communities. Through the hard work and determination of its residents and the local 75th Police Precincts, a ''Stop the Violence'' concert was recently organized on July 16, 1995. The purpose of the event was to promote and enhance positive relations between community residents and the Police Officers that serve and protect them.

Through cultural performances and other presentations, young people were exposed to an enlightening and positive atmosphere. Recognizing the limited resources available to support creative and ongoing events such as this one, I must applaud the efforts of the Police Department, community residents, and other collaborative groups for making this activity possible. It is through a collective and innovative strategy that our communities will be able to bring about positive social change. I must also acknowledge the dedication and outstanding track record of Police Officers' Richard Perez and Dennis Rivera.

I believe we must use this event as a model strategy for bridging gaps in communication within our cities and neighborhoods. We must also give praise and support to the individuals and organizations that make these activities possible. The communities of Cypress Hills and East New York have made a valuable contribution to society—an investment in our young people. Thank you.

IN MEMORIAL OF DAVID J. WHEELER

HON. WES COOLEY

OF OREGON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, July 21, 1995

Mr. COOLEY. Mr. Speaker, yesterday I submitted a bill (H.R. 2061) to name the Federal building in Baker City, OR, after the late David J. Wheeler. I rise today to offer a few words in memory of Mr. Wheeler.

Baker City is a close-knit community in eastern Oregon—a little over an hour from the Idaho border. The town, lying just east of the beautiful Blue Mountains, was deeply affected by the recent loss of David Wheeler, one of the community's best-loved citizens. Mr. Wheeler, an employee of the U.S. Forest Service, was inspecting bridges in the Payette National Forest in late April when he was brutally murdered by two teenaged thugs.

Mr. Wheeler's death has had a tremendous impact on the entire Baker City community, because he was an active civic leader involved in and committed to his adopted Oregon hometown. In 1994, Mr. Wheeler was selected by the Baker County Chamber of Commerce as the Baker County Father of the Year. At the time of his death, Mr. Wheeler was president-elect of the Baker City Rotary Club. He was a leader in the United Methodist Church, where he served as chair of the staff-parish relations committee. He served as a coach at the local YMCA and was a member of the Baker County Community Choir. The import of the above is clear, Mr. Speaker—Mr. Wheeler was a model Forest Service employee, a dedicated family man, and an admired and respected citizen.

I am honored to propose that the Federal building in Baker City be dedicated to his memory.

HELPING SCHOOLS MEET THE ''DIETARY GUIDELINES FOR AMERICANS''

HON. GEORGE MILLER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, July 21, 1995

Mr. MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, today I am joining Mr. GOODLING in bipartisan legislation—H.R. 2066—to give schools more flexibility in the methods they may choose to improve the quality of their meals and to meet the dietary recommendations in the ''Dietary Guidelines for Americans,'' including the appropriate levels of recommended dietary allowance for nutrients and energy. I stand firm in my support for improving the nutritional value of school meals and for the legislation passed last year requiring schools to meet the guidelines in the time line indicated in Public Law 103–448.

In last year's reauthorization of the National School Lunch Act, Democrats and Republicans joined together to support the ''Dietary Guidelines for Americans.'' Our goal was, and is, for the school lunch program to provide healthy meals that kids will eat. The reauthorization bill—Public Law 103–448—requires schools to bring their meals into compliance by the first day of the 1996–97 school year.