

ADDRESS OF MR. BENJAMIN A. MEED AT THE NATIONAL CIVIC COMMEMORATION OF THE DAYS OF REMEMBRANCE

HON. TOM LANTOS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 5, 1998

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, on Thursday, April 23, Members of Congress joined with representatives of the diplomatic corps, executive and judicial branch officials, and hundreds of Holocaust survivors and their families to commemorate the National Days of Remembrance in the rotunda of the United States Capitol. The touching words of Mr. Benjamin Meed, one of the most prominent and active survivors in the United States, reflected the emotional and poignant focus of the ceremony: "Children of the Holocaust: Their Memories, Our Legacy." Through poetry and personal reflections, Mr. Meed affected us all.

As a survivor of the Holocaust myself, I was especially moved by Mr. Meed's remarks. He delicately spoke:

Many survivors became part of this great country that adopted us, and we are grateful Americans. Although we are now in the winter of our lives, we look toward the future, because we believe in sharing our experiences—by bearing witness and educating others—there is hope of protecting new generations of men, women and children—who might be abandoned and forgotten, persecuted and murdered. . . . Knowing that the impossible is possible, there is the chance that history can be repeated—unless we are mindful.

Mr. Speaker, I share this mission with Mr. Meed. We must never, ever forget.

Benjamin Meed was born in Warsaw, Poland. He worked as a slave laborer for the Nazis, survived in the Warsaw Ghetto and was an active member of the Warsaw Underground with his wife, Vladka. A member of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council since its inception, he chairs the Museum's Days of Remembrance Committee. He is President of the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors and a leader of a number of other organizations. Mr. Meed founded the Benjamin and Vladka Meed Registry of Jewish Holocaust Survivors permanently housed at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Mr. Speaker, insert Benjamin Meed's Days of Remembrance address for the RECORD.

CHILDREN OF THE HOLOCAUST: THEIR MEMORIES, OUR LEGACY

Members of the diplomatic corps, distinguished members of the United States Senate and House of Representatives, members of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, distinguished guests, fellow survivors and dear friends, welcome to the 19th national Days of Remembrance commemoration.

First, let me take this opportunity to express our gratitude to the members of the United States Congress for their strong support of the Holocaust Memorial Museum. The enormous success of the Museum and its educational and Remembrance programs is due, in large part, to your efforts on our behalf. Thank you.

We gather together again to remember those whom we loved and lost in the pit of hell—the Holocaust. We dedicate this commemoration to all the precious children of

the Holocaust, their memories, our legacy. More than a million and a half children—almost all of them Jewish—were struck down without pity. They were murdered simply for who they were, Jews.

The young ones, who were silenced forever, were the hope and future of our people. We will never know the extent of human potential that was destroyed—the scientists, the writers, the musicians—gifted talent burned to ashes by German Nazi hate.

At such tender ages, our children grew old overnight. They quickly learned how to conceal pain and how to cover up fear. More importantly, with natural compassion, they comforted those around them. The writer and educator Itazek Katznelson was so touched by an abandoned little girl caring for her baby brother in the Warsaw Ghetto that he composed a poem about her. And I quote:

Thus it was at the end of the winter of 1942 in such a poor house of shelter for children, I saw the ones just gathered from the streets. In this station, I saw a girl about five years old.

She fed her younger brother—and he cried. The little one was sick.

In a diluted bit of jam, she dipped tiny crusts of bread

and skillfully inserted them into his mouth. This my eyes were privileged to see—

to see this mother of five years, feeding her child

and to her soothing words.

How can we survivors forget these martyred children? Their lives, their laughter, their gentle love, their strength and bravery in the face of certain death are still part of our daily lives. Their acts of courage and resistance remain a heroic inspiration. Their cries to be remembered ring across the decades. And we hear them. They are always in our thoughts in our sleepless nights, in our pained hearts.

Like all survivors, there are many horrible events that I witnessed, but one particular event deeply troubles me and hounds me. It was in April, fifty-five years ago, almost to this day. Passing as an "Aryan" member of the Polish community, I was in Krasinski Square near the walls of the Warsaw Ghetto. Inside the Ghetto, the uprising was underway. Guns and grenades thundered; the ghetto was ablaze. From where I was standing, I could feel the heat from the fires. There were screams for help from the Jews inside the walls. But the people surrounding me outside the walls went about their daily lives, insensitive and indifferent to the tragedy-in-progress. I watched in disbelief as, across the Square, a merry-go-round spun around and around to the joy of my Polish neighbor's children, while within the Ghetto only a few yards away, our Jewish children were being burned to death. To this day, the scene still enrages me. How can one forget the agony of the victims? How can we explain such moral apathy of the bystanders?

Many of us were children in the Holocaust. Whether by luck or by accident, we survived. Liberation by the Allied Armies restored us to life, and our gratitude to the soldiers will always remain. The flags that stand behind me from the liberating divisions of the United States Army and from the Jewish Brigade are far more than cloth. In 1945 and today, they are the symbols of freedom and hope for us survivors. Today we are bringing history together.

Liberation offered new opportunities and we seized them. The transition was very brief. We helped to create a new nation—the State of Israel, which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. Our history might have been very different if only Israel had existed 60 years ago. Nevertheless, we are here, and

Israel is our response and Remembrance of the Holocaust. Mr. Ambassador Ben Elissar, please convey to the people of Israel our commitment and solidarity with them.

Many survivors became part of this great country that adopted us, and we are grateful Americans. Although we are now in the winter of our lives, we look toward the future, because we believe in sharing our experiences—by bearing witness and educating others—there is hope of protecting new generations of men, women and children—who might be abandoned and forgotten, persecuted and murdered. We remember not for ourselves, but for others, and those yet unborn. Knowing that the impossible is possible, there is the chance that history can be repeated—unless we are mindful.

The task of preserving Holocaust memory will soon pass to our children and grandchildren; to high school and middle school teachers; to custodians of Holocaust centers; and, most importantly to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. But monuments of stone and well-written textbooks are not enough. Personal dedication to Remembrance—to telling and retelling the stories of the Holocaust with their lessons for humanity—must become a mission for all humankind, for all generations to come.

In these great halls of Congress, we see many symbols of the ideals that America represents—liberty, equality and justice. It was the collective rejection of such principles by some nations that made the Holocaust possible. Today, let us—young and old alike—promise to keep an ever watchful eye for those who would deny and defy these precious principles of human conduct. Let us remember. Thank you

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

HON. RON KIND

OF WISCONSIN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 5, 1998

Mr. KIND. Mr. Speaker, the partisan rhetoric coming out of the House of Representatives has reached new heights. An overwhelming amount of time, money and energy is being spent by both sides of the aisle on the investigation campaign finance abuses during the 1996 elections. Recent actions by members of the House Government Reform and Oversight Committee has created more cynicism among the public over our ability to do anything about this issue, other than score political points. It is time, Mr. Speaker, to direct attention to fixing the obvious problems in the current system.

The Freshman members of the 105th Congress have made campaign finance reform a top priority for this Congress. Unlike previous classes of Congress, my colleague and I have committed ourselves to working cooperatively to make changes in the system. We have put aside our differences and drafted a bill, H.R. 2183, which enjoys bipartisan support and will address the most obvious abuses in our current campaign finance laws.

Mr. Speaker, it is time for the House of Representatives to follow the lead of the newest members of this body. It is time to put aside the partisan differences and support a campaign finance bill which will begin to take the influence of big money out of the political system, H.R. 2183. The people of my district will not accept "no" for an answer.