



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 111th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 155

WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2009

No. 157

House of Representatives

The House met at 10:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Ms. EDWARDS of Maryland).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
October 27, 2009.

I hereby appoint the Honorable DONNA F. EDWARDS to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

NANCY PELOSI,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 6, 2009, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 30 minutes and each Member, other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip, limited to 5 minutes.

SHANNON MELENDI AWARENESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) for 5 minutes.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Madam Speaker, October 20, 2009 should have marked the 35th birthday of Shannon Denise Melendi; instead, she will be forever the 19-year-old victim of kidnapping and rape whose life was tragically ended at the hands of a ruthless killer.

Shannon was a gifted young college sophomore from Miami attending Emory University in Atlanta. In Miami, at Southwest High School, my alma mater, she was president of the

junior and senior class and a champion orator who was captain of the debate team for 3 years. She was also in the National Honor Society and graduated cum laude in the top 3 percent of her class.

As a member of the Legal Eagles club, Shannon was an aspiring attorney whose ultimate goal was to sit on the Supreme Court. During her senior year, Shannon even spoke before the United Nations and Congress.

With grand dreams and a promising future ahead of her, nothing could have turned out to be more tragic than her disappearance. The news was devastating to her home community as it was to the Atlanta area where she had already established herself as a bright individual with an even brighter future.

She disappeared without a trace on March 26, 1994 while working at a part-time job at a softball country club. Shortly after, the first 10,000 posters and 60 billboards went up in Atlanta with Shannon's picture declaring her missing. Not long after that, her father, Luis Melendi, had the signs changed to "kidnapped."

Calvin "Butch" Hinton was named as a suspect. He was a coworker and an umpire she knew through her part-time job. Many pieces of evidence linked him to the disappearance of Shannon, but unfortunately not enough for a solid case. In a strange twist of fate, this demented man burned down his own home to keep the authorities from investigating him further, but he was sentenced to 9 years in prison for fraud when he tried to collect insurance on that house fire.

Then, more than 11 years after Shannon had disappeared, Hinton had just been released from prison when he was rearrested and placed on trial for Shannon's murder. After many heart-wrenching moments in the trial, the verdict came back guilty and Hinton was sentenced to life in prison.

Because of the atrocious acts of this horrible man, a bright young life was extinguished and the world is forever poorer because of it. Chillingly, though, this murderer is up for parole in 2011. With the confessed perpetrator behind bars, we have the comfort of knowing that no other person can fall victim to him, and that is why we should fight to keep him there in prison. Unfortunately, many perpetrators are roaming the streets today still preying on the most innocent of victims. Let us make sure that Calvin Hinton is not one of them.

Shannon's parents, Luis and Yvonne, as well as her sister, Monique, are still active today in efforts to protect children by strengthening our laws and protecting and educating youth and their families about violence and perpetrators. They honor their daughter and their sister, Shannon, and the countless other children like Shannon through their work. Shannon's story must serve as a reminder to students that they must always be aware of their surroundings and stay safe.

As a mother and grandmother, I cannot imagine the heartache the Melendis have gone through. Luis Melendi still speaks to high school seniors about the dangers posed by perpetrators and reminds them that this could happen to anyone. Last week, on what should have been their daughter's 35th birthday, the Melendi family spoke to the students at Coral Shores High School in Tavernier to keep Shannon's memory alive and to drive home the idea of being aware and being safe. With these efforts and the laws that we pass, we can help protect our Nation's youth.

It is in honor and remembrance of Shannon Melendi that I urge my colleagues to remain champions and protectors of our youth. Through the life of Shannon Melendi we know that even though it was short, we can make sure that the lessons learned from her murder last eternally.

This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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