

Bob was a co-worker of Kelly, my girlfriend whom I would later marry. One day, Bob asked Kelly if we would like to join them for dinner. Kelly accepted readily, but my discomfort was palpable. On the way there, I asked Kelly what I should do if either of these men tried to hug me.

My uneasiness lasted throughout the evening. And even today, more than a decade later, it still creeps up on me at times. But as I got to know Bob and Scott, and other gay people since then, I reached this conclusion about homosexual relationships: They are not much different from heterosexual ones.

At their essence is the same kind of spark that exists between straight couples. They go through the same excitements and disappointments. And, like their straight counterparts, gay relationships are far more about respect, trust and commitment than they are about sex.

The most significant difference between gay and straight relationships, I discovered, was the atmosphere in which they exist. The love between straight people is celebrated and affirmed; gay love is attacked and condemned.

Legalizing homosexual marriages would diminish these attacks. It would take the wind from the sails of the true sexual bigots, encouraging an evolution in attitude similar to the one we have experienced with interracial and inter-religious unions. Gay people, at least to some extent, would be freed from their embattled status.

But the benefits of gay marriage, I believe, would extend beyond the gay community.

The rest of us would benefit because legitimizing gay marriage would bolster the institution of marriage. How? By reminding all of us that at its core, marriage is not so much about gender, or sex, or politics, but about caring, maturing, committed love.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. WILLIAM M. THOMAS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 20, 1996

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. Speaker, yesterday I missed a vote on an amendment to H.R. 3662, which passed by a 93 vote margin, 257 to 164. I oppose the amendment which would resume designating critical habitat for the marbled murrelet and would have voted against the amendment had I not been detained discussing a matter of importance to some of my Tulare County constituents with Members of the Senate in the Senate Chamber.

For too long, the Endangered Species Act has hurt our economy and wasted public resources. As a cosponsor of H.R. 2275, I believe Congress must reform the Endangered Species Act, so that it will contain strict requirements for scientific documentation and mandate objective evaluation of evidence prior to any species being listed and a habitat designation made. If society wants to protect a species, then society should pay for it, and not lay the costs onto the backs of that segment of society who own property on which so-called endangered species live.

FOOD STAMPS AND THE ELECTRONIC BENEFIT TRANSFER SYSTEM

HON. PAT ROBERTS

OF KANSAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 20, 1996

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing legislation concerning the Food Stamp Program and the electronic benefit transfer [EBT] system, on behalf of myself and BILL EMERSON, the chairman of the Department Operations, Nutrition, and Foreign Agriculture Subcommittee, who is an expert in the food stamp and EBT programs. We are introducing this bill, along with other members of the Committee on Agriculture, because we believe that EBT systems, in which food stamp benefits are provided through a debit card system instead of coupons, are the preferred choice of delivering food benefits. The inspector general of USDA, in his testimony of February 1, 1995, before the committee, made it clear that EBT systems, while not eliminating trafficking in food stamps, were superior to coupons and a tool that can be used in tracking down persons abusing the Food Stamp Program.

It is vital that States be allowed to proceed with implementation of EBT systems for the Food Stamp Program. An element that is standing in the way of implementation of EBT is a Federal Reserve Board rule known as regulation E. This rule, among other provisions, would create a new entitlement to the replacement of food stamps for persons receiving their benefits under an EBT system. The bill we are introducing provides that regulation E will not apply to the Food Stamp Program.

The National Governors' Association supports exemption of State and local EBT programs from the regulation E provisions and have stated their opposition to unfunded mandates that are created by the liability provisions of regulation E. The National Governors' Association also stated that without this exemption, States will not be able to move forward with EBT.

For more than 10 years the U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA], at the direction of Congress, has been investigating the feasibility, cost-effectiveness, and general impact of using an electronic benefit transfer [EBT] system to issue food stamp benefits. Paper coupons are replaced and recipients use a debit-like card at the grocery store checkout. Counties in several States, including Pennsylvania, Minnesota, New Mexico, and New Jersey have implemented EBT and Maryland, Texas, Utah, and South Carolina have EBT systems statewide.

USDA has found that EBT administrative costs are lower than coupon issuance costs; that food stamp benefit loss and trafficking are reduced; grocery store costs are reduced; food stamp participants prefer EBT; and financial institutions also prefer EBT and their costs are reduced.

Law enforcement officials have spoken in favor of EBT because it provides an electronic trail of abuses in the program. While trafficking is not eliminated under an EBT system, incidental street trafficking is reduced considerably.

States want to move ahead with EBT. Regulation E rules stand in their way. Until re-

cently, USDA viewed regulation E as inappropriate for the Food Stamp Program. USDA, in May 1993, stated its opposition to the applicability of regulation E to its programs because those programs do not fall under the jurisdiction of that regulation; legislation and regulations for the USDA programs already have provisions for benefit recipient rights and protection; and regulation E may reduce benefit recipient's services.

However, in June 1995, the Federal Electronic Benefits Transfer Task Force, represented by officials from the Office of Management and Budget, the USDA, and the Department of Health and Human Services, stated its opposition to removing regulation E applicability for the food stamp and other assistance programs. This is very unfortunate and this position is contrary to the positions of the National Governors' Association, the National Conference of State Legislators, the National Association of Counties, and the American Public Welfare Association.

According to a 1993 Department of the Treasury study, application of regulation E for State EBT systems would cost States over \$800 million per year for Aid to Families with Dependent Children [AFDC], food stamp and general assistance programs. This represents an unfunded mandate to the States and many States have said they could cease EBT program planning and operations if regulation E is applied to them.

For these reasons we are introducing this bill today and urge our colleagues to support it.

H.R. —

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Encouragement of Electronic Benefit Transfer Systems Act".

SEC. 2. AMENDMENT.

Section 7(i) of the Food Stamp Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 2016(i)) is amended by adding at the end the following:

"(7) ENCOURAGE ELECTRONIC BENEFIT TRANSFER SYSTEMS.—

"(A) IN GENERAL.—The disclosures, protections, responsibilities, and remedies established under section 904 of the Electronic Fund Transfer Act (15 U.S.C. 1693b), and any regulation or order issued by the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System in accordance with such Act, shall not apply to benefits under this Act delivered through any electronic benefit transfer system.

"(B) REPLACEMENT OF BENEFITS.—Any regulation issued by the Secretary regarding the replacement of benefits under this Act, and liability for replacement of benefits under this Act, and liability for replacement of benefits under this Act, under an electronic benefit transfer system shall be similar to the regulations in effect for a paper food stamp issuance system.

"(C) DEFINITION OF ELECTRONIC BENEFIT TRANSFER SYSTEM.—As used in this paragraph, the term 'electronic benefit transfer system' means a system under which a governmental entity distributes benefits determined under this Act, or other benefits or payments, by establishing accounts to be accessed electronically by recipients of the benefits, including through the use of an automated teller machine, a point-of-sale terminal, or an intelligent benefit card."

THANK YOU, WILLIAM C. AYRE

HON. JAMES A. BARCIA

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 20, 1996

Mr. BARCIA. Mr. Speaker, the heart of our democratic system of Government is local government. People concerned about the current situation and future of their communities depend upon local government to meet their most immediate needs. And the success of local government depends upon dedicated individuals who are willing to deal directly with both the people and the issues on a daily basis.

For the past 18 years, Genesee Township, within my congressional district, has had the good fortune to be ably represented by William C. Ayre, as the Township's Supervisor. He is retiring after 18 years of commitment to making Genesee Township a constantly better place, and he is being recognized for his service tomorrow evening.

William Ayre is one of those individuals who works at causes in which he believes. In addition to having been Township Supervisor for the past 18 years, he has also served on several Genesee County committees, the Mass Transit Authority, the Genesee County Economic Growth Alliance, the Flint Area Narcotics Group, as well as several positions within the Michigan Townships Association. In fact, he served as the president of the Michigan Township Association in 1995, as well as a member of the Board of Directors of the National Associations of Towns and Townships.

His commitment is no surprise to anyone who knows him, as best evidenced by his 36 year marriage to his wife, Sandra. His two children and seven grandchildren who have seen his commitment to his community, and know of his dedication to this nation through his service in the Air Force, including 3 years in Germany, have had the kind of guidance and role model that we hope for for all children.

Mr. Speaker, as William Ayre continues his commitment to his community by now moving on to another position with the Genesee County Road Commission, I ask that you and all of our colleagues join me in thanking him for his years of service, and wishing him the very best in all that lies ahead for him and his family.

ALBANIA TAKES A GIANT STEP BACKWARD IN DEMOCRACY

HON. JOHN EDWARD PORTER

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 20, 1996

Mr. PORTER. Mr. Speaker, on May 26 the world watched as Albania, Europe's poorest country, which for decades has suffered under a fanatical strain of communism, held its first elections since the Democratic Party defeated the former Communist Party. But what we saw did not even remotely resemble the makings of democracy. The elections were riddled with fraud, coercion, and other violations before, during, and after the voting. To put it simply, these elections were neither free nor fair. According to a June 6 article in the Washington

Post these elections were the most flawed elections held in Eastern Europe since 1989.

Mr. Speaker, when compared to the authoritarian ways of its brutal past, Albanians have made commendable strides in both economic and social reform. But lingering human rights problems and the inability to develop certain democratic institutions raise very serious questions regarding Albania's future.

These recent elections, which are the culmination of an emerging pattern of authoritarian tendencies, should stand as a loud, clear signal to the world that Albania has strayed from the course of democracy. Albania's failure to embrace democracy threatens the stability of the entire Balkan region.

As a champion of democracy throughout the world, the U.S. Government must not, and cannot, ignore the fact that this election was neither free nor fair. It is incumbent upon us to speak out against oppression and subversion of democratic institutions in the struggling countries which are attempting to build them. We must hold accountable those who perpetrate election abuses, or democracy will never take root in Albania.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in working to increase security in the Balkan region by urging the Albanian Government to hold elections which are free, fair, and subject to international monitoring. The Albanian people deserve the opportunity to exercise their new democratic ideals, and they deserve our full support.

RECOGNITION OF THE HONORABLE FLOYD FLAKE AND BISHOP DON- ALD HILLIARD

HON. ROBERT G. TORRICELLI

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 20, 1996

Mr. TORRICELLI. Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, June 22, 1996, the Cathedral Second Baptist Church in Perth Amboy, NJ will have a ribbon cutting ceremony for the Donald Hilliard, Jr. community affairs complex. The building will be named in honor of Bishop Donald Hilliard, the pastor of the Cathedral Second Baptist Church.

My friend and colleague, Congressman Floyd Flake, will be the featured guest speaker of Saturday's grand event. Reverend Flake not only represents the sixth congressional district in the State of New York but also is the distinguished pastor of Allen AME Church, Jamaica NY, which boasts more than 6,000 members.

Rev. Congressman Floyd Flake, a man with a vision of empowerment for the African-American people, no doubt will provide an inspiring message on Saturday. As pastor of Allen AME Church, a post he assumed in 1976, he has founded the Allen Housing Development Fund Corp., Allen Christian School and Multipurpose Center, Allen Home Care Agency, Allen Housing Corp., and the Allen Neighborhood Preservation and Development Corp. Furthermore, through numerous other clerical, civic, and community organizations, Reverend Congressman Flake has sought to provide spiritual sustenance reaching far beyond the walls of church. He also shows his tenacity in the House of Representatives as he fights for racial justice and equal rights for all Americans.

Similar to his colleague, Bishop Donald Hilliard, an active and dynamic leader, has also sought to improve the life of not only his members, but of the surrounding area of Perth Amboy, as well. Bishop Hilliard, who currently serves as the senior pastor of the Second Baptist Church of Perth Amboy and Bishop elect of the covenant fellowship of pastors, churches, ministries, and the cathedral assemblies, has nurtured and watched his church grow from a membership of 135 to more than 4,000. Furthermore, he has witnessed the church's budget increase from \$73,000 to \$3,000,000 annually. Not only does this make his church one of the fastest growing in the State, but is has been cited as a model church for growth by American Baptist churches, U.S.A., as well.

Since 1983, when Rev. Dr. Donald Hilliard was called to pastor the Cathedral Second Baptist Church, both the congregation and church have experienced tremendous growth. The successful purchase and renovation of the historic Majestic theater in downtown Perth Amboy has provided a new house of worship for Bishop Hilliard and his members. The cathedral blends turn of the century elegance with state-of-the-art technology to provide its worshipers with a unique combination of history and future dreams. The church also purchased the historic ELKS lodge, directly across the street from the cathedral, which now has been converted into the Family Life Enrichment Center. This facility is complete with an elegant banquet hall with adjoining kitchen facilities, a library, a learning center, and a computer lab. Renovations are continuing on the third and fourth floors which will house offices, classrooms, a lecture hall, and a liturgical dance/cultural arts studio.

Mr. Speaker, while Bishop Hilliard came to the Cathedral Second Baptist Church with such credentials as his Bachelor of Arts from Eastern College and Master of Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary, he still found time to complete his Doctorate of Ministry from the United Theological Seminary, Samuel D. Proctor Fellow.

This dynamic speaker has had the honor of speaking at various churches, conferences, and conventions across the United States and Nigeria, West Africa. He was a visiting lecturer at Boston University, an adjunct professor at Princeton Theological and New Brunswick Theological Seminaries and adjunct faculty at Essex County College.

For more than 12 years, Bishop Hilliard has served as a member of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A. The national conventions consist of more than 30,000 churches and 8 million Baptist members across the country. He is also affiliated with the American Baptist churches, U.S.A., the Progressive National Baptist convention, the NAACP, United Negro College Fund, served on the advisory board for the Ronald McDonald children's charity, Multicultural advisory board at Eastern College, St. David's, PA, National Advisory Board at the United Theological Seminary, Dayton, OH, Perth Amboy Chamber of Commerce, Middlesex County Youth Services Commission Minority Subcommittee and the Perth Amboy Special Improvement District Committee. Moreover, he has received an award from Soul Brothers Inc. Community Award for outstanding efforts in uplifting the community, the Ronald L. Rice Award for outstanding human services from the NUAC of New Jersey, he