

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

PAYING TRIBUTE TO LES MERGELMAN

HON. SCOTT McINNIS

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 16, 2002

Mr. MCINNIS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to honor a great individual who has helped revitalize and strengthen his community's way of life. Les Mergelman is an example of success derived from hard work and determination. And it is a great honor to praise his efforts and contributions.

Les is retiring after thirteen proud years of service as the President of the Olathe State Bank. During his tenure, the bank prospered and thrived, becoming an instrumental piece of the Olathe financial community. Les helped regenerate lost revenue, and was instrumental in engineering the grand opening of the bank's main office in Olathe. However, Les is not one to bask in personal achievement, as he takes pride in the teamwork of his staff. He fervently believes in never giving up and keeping his head high regardless of the situation. Les's wisdom and leadership cannot, by any means, be duplicated, and each member of Les's office undoubtedly cherishes the countless contributions Les has made to the 'team.'

Mr. Speaker, I stand before you today to applaud the efforts of Les Mergelman before this body of Congress and this nation. The State of Colorado will always be grateful for his constant support of Olathe sweet corn and the culture of Colorado. We wish him the best with all the future endeavors that he undertakes. I fervently believe that he will continue to be a beacon to the Olathe community for years to come.

MONSIGNOR GEORGE C. HIGGINS

HON. DAVID R. OBEY

OF WISCONSIN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 16, 2002

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, in the tumult of recent events, the passing of a great man did not receive as much attention as it should have. Monsignor George C. Higgins died on May 1.

More than any other clergyman in this century, Monsignor Higgins personified the moral obligation that a just society has to honor work and workers. To me he more than anyone else over his long lifetime personified the demand for justice that should permeate our whole society.

E.J. Dionne, the thoughtful Washington Post columnist, wrote a splendid column on the death of Monsignor Higgins. I commend it to my colleagues.

THE GREAT MONSIGNOR

There is no such thing as a timely death. But just when you thought all the stories on

American priests were destined to be about evil committed and covered up, one of the truly great priests was called to his eternal reward.

Monsignor George G. Higgins was the sort of Catholic clergyman regularly cast as a hero in movies of the 1930s and '50s. He was an uncompromising pro-labor priest who walked picket lines, fought anti-Semitism, supported civil rights and wrote and wrote and wrote in the hope that some of his arguments about social justice might penetrate somewhere.

He got attached to causes before they became fashionable, and stuck with them after the fashionable people moved on. Cesar Chavez once said that no one had done more for American farm workers than Monsignor Higgins. In the 1980s, he traveled regularly to Poland in support of Solidarity's struggle against communism and became an important link between American union leaders and their Polish brethren.

As it happens, even the day of Monsignor Higgins's death, at the age of 86, was appropriate. He passed from this world on May 1, the day that many countries set aside to honor labor and that the Catholic Church designates as the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker.

If Higgins had been there when that famous carpenter was looking for a place to spend the night with his pregnant wife, the monsignor would certainly have taken the family in. He would also have handed Joseph a union card, told him he deserved better pay and benefits, and insisted that no working person should ever have to beg for shelter.

Yes, Higgins sounds so old-fashioned—and in every good sense he was—that you might wonder about his relevance to our moment. Let us count the ways.

One of the most astonishing and disturbing aspects of the Catholic Church's current scandal is the profound disjunction—that's a charitable word—between what the church preaches about sexuality and compassion toward the young and how its leaders reacted to the flagrant violation of these norms by priests.

Higgins, who spent decades as the Catholic Church's point man on labor and social-justice issues, hated the idea of preachers' exhorting people to do one thing and then doing the opposite. And so he made himself into a true pain for any administrator of any Catholic institution who resisted the demands of workers for fair pay and union representation.

"These men and women mop the floors of Catholic schools, work in Catholic hospital kitchens and perform other sometimes menial tasks in various institutions," he once wrote. "They have not volunteered to serve the church for less than proportionate compensation."

"The church has a long history of speaking out on justice and peace issues," he said. "Yet only in more recent times has the church made it clear that these teachings apply as well to the workings of its own institutions."

Where some religious leaders complain that they get caught up in scandal because they are unfairly held to higher standards, Higgins believed that higher standards were exactly the calling of those who claim the authority to tell others what to do.

It bothered Higgins to the end of his life that the cause of trade unionism had become

so unfashionable, especially among well-educated and well-paid elites. For 56 years, he wrote a column for the Catholic press, and he returned to union issues so often that he once felt obligated to headline one of his offerings: "Why There's So Much Ado About Labor in My Column."

His answer was simple: "I am convinced that we are not likely to have a fully free or democratic society over the long haul without a strong and effective labor movement."

To those who saw collective bargaining as outdated in a new economy involving choice, mobility and entrepreneurship, Higgins would thunder back about the rights of those for whom such a glittering world was still, at best, a distant possibility: hospital workers, farm workers, fast-food workers and others who need higher wages to help their children reach their dreams. He could not abide well-paid intellectuals who regularly derided unions as dinosaurs, and he told them so, over and over.

It is one of the highest callings of spiritual leaders to force those who live happy and comfortable lives to consider their obligations to those heavily burdened by injustice and deprivation. It is a great loss when such prophetic voices are stilled by scandal and the cynicism it breeds. Fortunately, that never happened to Higgins. He never had to shut up about injustice and, God bless him, he never did.

HONORING LAURA E. PAUL LONG ON HER 100TH BIRTHDAY

HON. GEORGE W. GEKAS

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 16, 2002

Mr. GEKAS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Mrs. Laura E. Paul Long of Gratz, Pennsylvania. On August 3, Laura will be celebrating her 100th birthday.

Laura is the daughter of Maria Hoch Paul and David D. Paul and was born on August 3, 1902, in Leck Kill, Pennsylvania. She spent her childhood in Lower Mahanoy Township with her parents and siblings and was married in 1922 to Samuel Felix Long.

Laura worked at Pillow Manufacturing in Pillow, Pennsylvania and for Dormar Manufacturing located in Gratz, Pennsylvania. She finally retired from Dormar Manufacturing around the age of 68.

Content with her life in Pennsylvania, Laura never left the state until after she retired when she traveled throughout Europe with her youngest daughter.

Although noted for her crocheting, Laura is renowned for her talent at continuing a line of geraniums descendant from the plants she grew on her farm in Klingerstown, PA in the 1930's. Her geraniums still thrive today.

Laura is also very dedicated to her family with nine children, 29 grandchildren, 43 great-grandchildren, and 23 great-grandchildren. She was widowed in 1966.

I ask my colleagues in the House to join me in wishing Laura a wonderful One-Hundredth Birthday and continued health and happiness for many years to come.

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