

MAJOR HENRY A. COMMISKEY, SR.
POST OFFICE BUILDING

SPEECH OF

HON. GENE TAYLOR

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, November 4, 2003

Mr. TAYLOR of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, it is my honor to present H.R. 2438, a bill to designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 115 West Pine Street in Hattiesburg, Mississippi as the "Major Henry A. Commiskey, Sr. Post Office Building". The Hattiesburg City Council and the Forrest County Board of Supervisors requested through official resolutions that the downtown Hattiesburg Post Office be named for the late Major Commiskey, who received the Medal of Honor during his lifetime.

Henry Alfred Commiskey, Sr. was born in Hattiesburg on January 10, 1927. He attended the Sacred Heart School there and worked as a brakeman on the Illinois Central Railroad before joining the Marine Corps on January 12, 1944, two days after his 17th birthday. Commiskey participated in the February 1945 invasion of Iwo Jima during World War II, where he earned the Purple Heart for being wounded in action. He also received the Letter of Commendation for "exhibiting high qualities of leadership and courage in the face of a stubborn and fanatical enemy."

Commiskey remained in the Corps after the war and rose to the rank of staff sergeant to become a drill instructor at the Parris Island boot camp in South Carolina. He later graduated from Officer Candidate School and was commissioned a second lieutenant on September 10, 1949. He volunteered for combat service at the outbreak of the Korean War and was sent to Korea with the 1st Marine Regiment in August of 1950, where he participated in the Inchon landing. A few days later, on September 20, 1950, Commiskey earned the Medal of Honor for his heroism atop Hill 85 near Yongdungp'o, Korea, on the outskirts of Seoul.

Serving as a platoon leader in Company C, First Battalion, First Marines, First Marine Division (reinforced), Second Lieutenant Commiskey spearheaded the assault that was ordered on forces that were well dug in on Hill 85. Charging up the steep slopes on the run into heavy enemy machine-gun and small arms fire, he ran ahead of his men and was the first to reach the crest of their objective. Armed only with a pistol, he jumped into a hostile machine-gun emplacement occupied by five enemy soldiers, engaged in hand-to-hand combat, and killed them all. He then moved to the next emplacement, where he killed two more enemy soldiers before leading his men on further to route their adversaries and take the hill.

Although Commiskey miraculously escaped harm during the assault on Hill 85, he was wounded a week later and then again on December 8, 1950. He was then returned to the United States for hospitalization and later promoted to first lieutenant in June of 1951. Commiskey was presented the Medal of Honor by President Truman at a White House ceremony on August 1, 1951, becoming the first Marine to be so awarded for extraordinary heroism in the Korean conflict. Commiskey then became a student naval aviator in Sep-

tember of 1951 at the Naval Air Station in Pensacola, Florida. He received his wings at Corpus Christi, Texas in June of 1953 and later completed jet training at El Toro, California. He was promoted to captain in July of 1953. In April of 1954, Commiskey returned to Korea as a pilot with Marine Attack Squadron 21, Marine Aircraft Group 12, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.

Commiskey returned to the United States in September of 1954 and continued his service as a recruitment officer and as an instructor for the Marine Corps School at Quantico, Virginia. He was promoted to the rank of major in July of 1959 and retired from active duty in August of 1966. Major Henry A. Commiskey, Sr. died in Meridian, Mississippi on August 15, 1971.

Last year, I originally introduced House Resolution 5495, a bill that was identical to the measure currently before us. The previous bill passed the House at the very end of the 107th Congress, but did not make it through the Senate before time ran out and the session ended. Due to that fact, I then reintroduced the bill for the 108th Congress, and it was designated with a new number. The entire Mississippi House delegation signed on as original cosponsors of both bills, for which I am very grateful. I also thank both the majority and minority leadership of the House of Representatives and the Government Reform Committee for shepherding the bill through the House once more.

On behalf of our Nation, the State of Mississippi, the citizens of the Hattiesburg area, the local officials there, and the Commiskey family, it is my privilege to present this legislation to the United States Congress in honor of Major Henry A. Commiskey, Sr., his sacrifice, and his awe-inspiring service to his country.

RECOGNIZING CONTINUED IMPORTANCE OF TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONSHIP AND PROMOTING STRONGER RELATIONS WITH EUROPE

SPEECH OF

HON. JO ANN DAVIS

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, November 5, 2003

Mrs. JO ANN DAVIS of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H. Res. 390, which passed the House last night, and wish to commend the Chairman of the Europe Subcommittee for his efforts to bring this important measure to the House.

As the Chairman noted, the recent debate over Iraq was a particularly difficult time for overall transatlantic relations. As my Colleague correctly pointed out, it is important to recognize that this dispute was with four nations in particular and not the whole of Europe. France and Germany are important friends and allies and it was particularly frustrating that we were having such a disagreement with them. However, we must not ignore the contributions and sacrifices the British, the Italians, the Spanish, the Poles and the many others who did stand beside us, provided during this difficult and dangerous time. And while some of us may have consumed "freedom fries" and avoided Bordeaux wines or Bittberger beer, many of us were happy to

travel to Prague for the NATO summit or to Rome for the Legislators' Dialogue in order to assess the state of our relationship and to work on ways to reenergize the U.S.-European partnership.

Now, however, it is time to move on. We must work to reestablish the kind of strong transatlantic relationship with all of Europe which is necessary if we are to deal effectively with those international issues which effect us on both sides of the Atlantic. The resolution before us recognizes that both the United States and Europe face serious challenges at home and abroad and that to meet these challenges we must adapt and strengthen the transatlantic partnership into a transatlantic community of action. As the resolution correctly states, the transatlantic relationship is much too important to allow an issue such as Iraq, however difficult, to result in both the United States and Europe drifting apart or worse, becoming rivals.

As Chair of the U.S. delegation to the Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue, I am especially pleased that the resolution mentions the importance of this organization and the kind of dialogue the TLD promotes with our counterparts in the European Parliament. As my Colleagues may know, in July, after the bitter debate over Iraq subsided, we had a very successful meeting of the TLD. During that meeting, both delegations pledged to rededicate ourselves to strengthening the transatlantic partnership by renewing our pursuit of common values such as democracy, human rights and open markets and societies and by reinforcing inter-parliamentary contacts.

At that meeting we also agreed to try to enhance the effectiveness of our operations by establishing new consultative mechanisms which would serve as an "early-warning" system designed to allow intensified dialogue on possible contentious issues at early stages of the legislative process.

Mr. Speaker, next week our Colleagues from the Parliament will be coming to the United States to continue our discussions. I believe we all understand and appreciate the importance of this dialogue and the need to continue to support stronger relations with Europe and its Union through mechanisms such as these Parliamentary exchanges.

I urge passage of this resolution.

COMMENDING THE AMERICAN VITILIGO RESEARCH FOUNDATION

HON. MICHAEL BILIRAKIS

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, November 6, 2003

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to call attention to a little-known but debilitating disease that profoundly impacts its victims.

Vitiligo is an auto-immune disorder which causes the skin to lose its pigmentation, resulting in the development of white patches around the bodies of those afflicted with it. Although its physical effects are neither as severe nor life-threatening as some diseases, vitiligo profoundly impacts the social and psychological well-being of its victims, particularly children and African-Americans.

Vitiligo may physically be painless, but the discrimination it precipitates hurts nonetheless. The more than 5 million American men,

women, and children who have vitiligo know the sting and emotional distress it causes. I have seen it in the eyes and heard it in the voices of those with whom I've met who have it.

I learned about vitiligo from one of my constituents, Stella Pavlides, who is the Founder and President of the American Vitiligo Research Foundation, which is headquartered in my congressional district in Clearwater, Florida. Stella is a tireless advocate who has dedicated her life to finding a cure for vitiligo and ending the hurt it causes. I have pledged to her that I will work with my House colleagues to raise public awareness about vitiligo so that we can make it a disease of the past and not the mystery illness shrouded in ignorance that it is today.

Mr. Speaker, I want to commend our colleague, Congressman TODD TIAHRT, for taking a leading role in helping me bring this disease to the attention of our colleagues. I hope that all of our colleagues will join us in raising public awareness about vitiligo and dedicating ourselves to helping the medical and scientific communities find a cure for it.

HONORING VETERANS

HON. MIKE MCINTYRE

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, November 6, 2003

Mr. MCINTYRE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the 77,000 veterans in my district who have dedicated their lives to fighting for this great country. All Americans must understand that we have a responsibility to support the men and women in uniform who risk their lives on a daily basis to protect the freedoms we enjoy. We must never forget that hundreds of millions of people in the United States and around the world sleep in peace because hundreds of thousands of Americans rest in graves all across the world—fallen heroes in the name of freedom. The price of freedom is always high, but the price of war is even higher! And no one knows that better than our Nation's veterans. As guardians of freedom, righteousness, and justice, their actions have cemented the foundation of this great Nation and helped shape the destiny of our Nation and our world. It is their continued spirit, service and sacrifice that have helped our country maintain its posture in the world, and we cannot afford to ignore the promises we made to them when they first made their promise to protect our country.

First, it's about our veterans' spirit—a spirit that has been unsurpassed. Over 48 million Americans have stepped forward to defend our land since our Nation's founding. And today, there are 25 million living veterans who have served in times of war and peace. Individuals who dared to make a difference, and people who were willing to take a stand—whether it was convenient or not! Let each of us continue to work and honor our veterans' spirit, who have proved their heroism and their love for our country—time and time again.

We must also pay tribute to our veterans' dedicated service to this country. From Lexington and Concord to Normandy and Okinawa, from Korea and Vietnam to the Persian Gulf, and from the streets of Baghdad to the mountains of Afghanistan, our veterans, mili-

tary retirees, servicemen and women have and are defending our great country at a great cost. No group of Americans deserve our admiration and respect more than those who have worn the uniform of the United States of America and fought to protect our homes, our way of life, our freedom, and our future.

Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear where I stand—on the side of our veterans! That's why I am an original cosponsor of a comprehensive veterans package. Highlights of this package include:

Under the current budget rules in Congress, veterans' benefits—the money for war service and war injuries are under mandatory spending—that means whatever the need, there has to be the resources. The money for VA hospitals and clinics falls under discretionary spending—that is a certain amount that is set aside, and if the need grows for more, then it may or may not be increased. I say that's wrong, and I am co-sponsoring legislation, the Veterans Health Care Funding Guaranteed Act, that would give veterans what they have been promised—lifelong benefits and health care. This would reduce the national disgrace that leaves 200,000 veterans waiting up to 6 months for an appointment at a Veterans Hospital. We can and must do better and my plan would reduce waiting times for first time doctor appointments to 30 days.

I support an interim disability payment of \$500 per month when claims are not expedited after remand.

I support a full repeal of the concurrent receipt issue. This inequity that prevents disabled military retirees from receiving both their pensions and disability pay is wrong. While we were able to make progress on this issue last year with a partial appeal, more needs to be done to fully repeal this, and I am working on that by signing a discharge petition to bring this bill directly to the floor of the House of Representatives so we can pass it.

I support legislation to phase out the reduction in benefits in the military Survivor Benefit Plan. The benefit to military spouses is not what enrollees were promised and the program is not providing the level of protection military survivors need and deserve.

I also support the Keep Our Promises to America's Military Act that would ensure full and adequate health coverage for all members of the uniformed services by allowing them to participate in the Federal Employees Health Benefit Program.

I support the Military Pay Equity Act that would increase the rates of military basic pay for members of the uniformed services.

I support efforts to improve the Montgomery GI Bill to ensure that higher education and training benefits are adequate.

I support legislation to allow Federal civilian and military retirees to pay health insurance premiums on a pretax basis and to allow a deduction for TRICARE supplemental premiums.

I support the Truth in Recruiting Act that would mandate that members of the Armed Forces shall be entitled to all benefits they were promised when they originally entered the service. Under this bill, each member of the Armed Forces would be given a written statement describing the benefits that will be provided to that person if he or she attains retirement status.

I support the Veteran's Right to Know Act that would require the VA to inform veterans about eligibility for benefits and health-care

services whenever a veteran first applies for any benefit with the VA. It would also help widows and survivors of veterans by informing them at the time of a burial request or application for life insurance proceeds about the full array of benefits available to them.

And recently, I submitted testimony to the VA Cares Commission urging them to expand the Fayetteville VA Medical Center, which currently operates in antiquated facilities. The proposed plan calls for an expansion of the outpatient facility and an additional 110,000 square feet. Because the Fayetteville clinic is such an important facility to veterans in North Carolina, it is important that it remains in the proposed national plan. I have also supported additional VA clinics in my district in Lumberton and Supply, as well as an expansion of the Wilmington VA clinic.

Finally, it is our veterans' sacrifice that has brought true freedoms to this nation! It is a sacrifice I have seen in the hearts and eyes of men and women in uniform around the globe with whom I have visited. It is a sacrifice that does not complain. It is a sacrifice that is respectful. It is a sacrifice that is genuine. And it is a sacrifice that we all must respect.

This is not a partisan issue. It is an American issue. And we must stand shoulder-to-shoulder and respect the spirit, service, and sacrifice of our nation's veterans. Nothing less is acceptable.

HEROISM FROM FIREFIGHTERS, EMERGENCY PERSONNEL AND OTHER FIRE RESPONDERS

HON. GARY G. MILLER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, November 6, 2003

Mr. GARY G. MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, the wildfires that burned across Southern California last week destroyed homes, devastated communities and left 20 dead in its wake. But from this horrific natural disaster, we witnessed heroism and determination from firefighters, emergency personnel and other first responders who put their lives on the line to save others. But we also witnessed true leadership from those directing operations and coordinating efforts from command centers scattered throughout the state.

One of these centers was located in the city of Rancho Cucamonga, which witnessed firsthand the fire's relentless march of destruction. At the helm of the city's strategic operations were Fire Chief Dennis Michael, Police Chief Pete Ortiz and City Manager Jack Lam. All three men, working closely with the mayor and city council, saved thousands of homes and protected just as many lives.

Mayor Alexander and his colleagues on the Rancho Cucamonga city council also deserve high praise for planning and preparing the city for this type of disaster. During the crisis and aftermath that followed, the residents of Rancho Cucamonga have been well served. And under their continued leadership, the community will rebuild.

Mr. Speaker, Rancho Cucamonga is a prosperous city nestled at the base of Southern California's foothill mountains. City leaders have dedicated their lives to ensure residents have a high quality of life, and because of this leadership and experience the community will recover.