

Delta Kappa Educational Society, and the American Association of School Administrators. Mrs. Klink's long list of publicized articles and also her guest presentations at the University of Cincinnati, Xavier University, Miami University, and Mt. St. Joseph College showcase her commitment to educational success.

Mrs. Klink, I offer my congratulations and gratitude for your long and successful career in the field of education. I wish you well in your future endeavors, and I hope you continue to achieve happiness and success wherever your life journey chooses to lead you throughout your retirement.

RESTORING AN OBLIGATION OF CITIZENSHIP

HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 12, 2005

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to draw our attention to the most important obligation of citizens in a democracy and to illuminate the discomfort of many Americans to the elimination of that obligation. I speak about the right to vote—the cornerstone of every democratic system of government, particularly ours.

Democracies are based on the principle that their citizens participate actively in the decision-making processes of the government. Whether in small communities or throughout the vast expanse of the Nation, citizens cast ballots to express their preferences and choices for the direction of the country and to determine the policies and leaders that will be implemented throughout the Nation. The voice of each and every citizen is expressed equally through their ballot and their ability to cast a ballot. Generations of Americans have fought and died to guarantee that all Americans share in this right and obligation.

Unfortunately, today we still face the predicament that millions of American citizens are denied their right to vote. They are denied the ability to influence policy, policymakers, political leaders, and the direction of the country that they belong to. Millions of American citizens who have been convicted of crimes in the past are denied the ability to cast ballots in elections. Regardless of the nature of their crime or any rehabilitation that may have occurred, these ex-felons cannot participate in the decision-making process of this great Nation.

Though they have served their time, fulfilled their sentence, and paid back their debt to society, millions of ex-felons continue to be punished for their past criminal records. Those who turned a corner in their life and fled the criminal path can never again fulfill the most important obligation of citizenship—voting. They remain on the outside looking in at our political system. They want, they deserve, the right to be re-integrated as full citizens into our system. Yet, the system stands firmly in their way, stripping them of their right to vote.

I bring this issue to the attention of the House of Representatives with the hope that this Congress will take the important steps of fulfilling the promises of democracy. I hope

that the House of Representatives would take action to restore the right to vote to American ex-felons. They have paid their debts to society and we should permit their participation in our democratic process. Too many Americans fought and died for this right to vote and too many today are denied the ability to exercise their rights.

I submit for the RECORD a Carib News article providing further evidence and argument for our consideration. Progress is being made on the restoration of rights to ex-felons, but immediate action is needed by this Congress.

[July 5, 2005]

PROGRESS IN RESTORING FELONS' RIGHT TO VOTE

Following victory in Iowa, where the Governor recently announced that he would reverse his state's lifetime ban on felon voting, advocates for restoring felons' right to vote expressed optimism that progress was being made in rolling back laws that disproportionately affect blacks and other minorities.

According to Catherine Weiss, a lawyer with the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University, felony disenfranchisement laws represent the last vestiges of Jim Crow that disenfranchise African Americans. As of 2000, almost 5 million Americans couldn't vote because of laws that restrict those convicted of a felony from casting ballots; four in 10 of those disenfranchised were black.

The full 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New York is also expected to hear arguments in cases brought by two prisoners who claim that the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which removed barriers to black voters, should be used to argue that the felony laws are unfair. Forty-eight states restrict voting rights for felons while they are behind bars or serving parole or probation. Four states—Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, and Virginia—ban voting for life on the grounds that such restrictions are justified. In 2001, New Mexico lifted a lifetime ban, and Nebraska followed suit in March. In several states, felons can now apply to have their voting rights restored.

The issue of disenfranchisement escalated in Florida after the 2000 presidential election, which was decided by fewer than 600 votes there. With more than 820,000 felons who could not vote as of 2000, Florida is said to have the largest disenfranchised population of any state.

One driving force behind efforts to roll back disenfranchisement laws is the nation's swelling prison population. Though crime rates have fallen the prison population soared to 2.1 million by June 2004, according to figures compiled by the Justice Department. In 1970, that number was about 200,000.

According to Theodore M. Shaw, president of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, who will present arguments in the New York cases, "As the numbers of prisoners have grown, more awareness of the injustice of it has also grown."

With 13 percent of all black men barred from voting because of disenfranchisement laws, advocates contend that many have become disengaged since felons also face prohibitions in other areas of life, such as living in public housing, obtaining identification cards, and getting student loans.

On June 22, in the shadow of the U.S. Federal Courthouse in Foley Square, standing before the African Burial Ground Memorial Sculpture, New Yorkers representing persons who have a felony conviction stood in silent protest to demand the full restoration of voting rights to the formerly incarcerated.

In recognition of a historic en banc hearing in the cases of Hayden v. Pataki and

Muntaqim v. Coombe, the silent protest was conducted as the Nation recognized the 40th anniversary of the passage and President Lyndon B. Johnson's signing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The landmark legislation extended voting rights confirmed in the 15th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution to disenfranchised blacks in southern states. The Act has since been reauthorized and its protections extended to language minorities and northern jurisdictions with a history of vote dilution, voter intimidation, and discriminatory polling practices.

The silent protest was staged to symbolically represent citizens, who for no other reason than having been incarcerated for felony offenses have been denied their voting rights while still being expected to fulfill all other obligations of citizenship, including paying taxes.

THANKING MR. RICK CHESSER

HON. E. CLAY SHAW, JR.

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 12, 2005

Mr. SHAW. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to thank Mr. Rick Chesser for his 35 years of support and dedication to the State of Florida as an employee of the Florida Department of Transportation. Rick has decided to retire from public services, yet at the time of his departure, he was the longest serving District Secretary with 17 years of service to District 4, which encompasses Broward, Palm Beach, Martin, St. Lucie, and Indian River counties.

Throughout his 17 years with the Florida Department of Transportation, Rick has compiled a lasting legacy. Under his watch, the district received much needed funding and he opened constructive dialogue between the district, the public and local elected officials. It should also be highlighted that within District 4, Rick allocated numerous hours to ensure mobility of constituents while simultaneously keeping the best results for the environment and quality of life at heart.

In particular, Rick's commitment to South Florida's public transportation system was never more evident when he served as project director for Interstate 595. Through this project, the Port Everglades Expressway was created, Interstate 75 was constructed, and Interstate 95 was widened in two of the five counties within his district. From there, funding was received for a tri-county rail system providing even greater accessibility for South Florida commuters.

As construction progressed with these numerous projects, Rick ensured the attractiveness of the land by providing District 4 the highest level of amenities in the state for landscaping, paver blocks, and decorative lighting. He also worked with individual cities to assist them in development plans that would shift with population growth.

Mr. Speaker, Rick Chesser's work for the State of Florida and that of District 4 will not be forgotten. Rick has made great strides in the development of various areas to raise the morale and the quality of life for all residents. We are indebted to him and to his service for the past 35 years. My staff and I wish him all the best in his retirement.

SENSE OF CONGRESS THAT THERE SHOULD BE ESTABLISHED A CARIBBEAN-AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

SPEECH OF

HON. ALCEE L. HASTINGS

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, June 27, 2005

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H. Con. Res. 71, a resolution supporting the establishment of a Caribbean-American Heritage month. This resolution is admirable and deeply appreciated in its recognition and celebration of the Caribbean-American community and of the contributions that community has made to every sphere of American life.

The American spirit is a tapestry that weaves cultures together, one in which people of all traditions and walks of life convene to better protect and educate one another. The Caribbean-American people are an invaluable part of his tapestry, and their influence has stretched to every field of American society, culture and politics.

The State of Florida is especially indebted to the Caribbean-American community, enjoying one of the largest and most flourishing Caribbean-American populations in the nation. The contributions of this community to Florida's economy, educational system, politics and culture, and indeed to all areas of our society, are of the greatest importance to our state and to our country.

I am so privileged to represent people of virtually every single Caribbean heritage. From Lauderdale to Miramar to West Palm Beach to Oakland Park, I am honored to work on behalf of all of these communities and many more.

As early as the 17th Century, Caribbean men and women journeyed to find new lives in America. Our regions have endured similarly difficult pasts. We shared a struggle against slavery, we shared a fight for independence, and now we share the strong ties built on social equality and democratic government.

Mr. Speaker, the United States has been profoundly shaped by the achievements of its Caribbean-American citizens. Whether in technology, science, the military, fashion, politics, government, business, education or journalism, the achievements of Caribbean-Americans have been immense and invaluable.

Some of the most revered figures in American art have come from the Caribbean-American community: actors, musicians, politicians, authors, educators and so many others. All of them have played central roles in the cultural development of this country.

This resolution enjoys strong bipartisan support including mine because it is critical for this body to acknowledge and appreciate those who contribute to America's unique and highly respected culture. I am proud to lend my support to this most excellent resolution, I urge my colleagues to do the same.

MILITARY PERSONNEL FINANCIAL SERVICES PROTECTION ACT

SPEECH OF

HON. DAVID SCOTT

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, June 27, 2005

Mr. SCOTT of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, today, I rise in support of Title II of, H.R. 458 Military Personnel Financial Services Protection Act. Title II of this measure regulates lenders who target the military and safeguards our armed services personnel from unscrupulous consumer credit lending and collection practices.

Many lenders have developed sales campaigns to market directly to military personnel. A few unscrupulous agents have made misleading pitches to 'captive' audiences, by posing as counselors on veteran's benefits and soliciting soldiers while they were on duty. In some instances, lenders have garnished military personnel's wages or required them to agree to have their loan repaid through the allotment system. Title II of H.R. 458 would clarify that lenders cannot garnish a military salary or give the appearance that they are agents of the military.

Predatory lenders have contacted or threatened to contact the borrower's commanding officer in order to collect debt. In addition, some lenders have required borrowers to sign documents as a condition of obtaining the loan that purportedly waive their legal rights, including requiring the borrower to submit to mandatory arbitration of any dispute. H.R. 458 would prohibit a lender to contact a loan recipient's chain of command and the measure would ensure that the customer's rights are not waived.

Title II in H.R. 458 recognizes that many military personnel are not aware of their borrowing options or rights or how to manage their finances after taking out a loan. To remember this problem, under Title II, military lenders would be required to provide detailed disclosures prior to the consummation of a loan transaction.

Last year, as a member of the House Committee on Financial Services, I expressed concerns about unscrupulous military lenders in several hearings. Some of these reported scams occurred at Fort Benning in my state of Georgia and were made public through a series of articles in the New York Times.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that Title II of H.R. 458 takes strong steps to ensure that our military men and women are not treated as second-class citizens when it comes to financial transactions and loans.

THE NEED FOR CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 12, 2005

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, today I come before this chamber to be heard on an issue of deep importance to US and Mexican relations. It is a concern that to many seems trivial but which in reality represents an important aspect of the cultural relationship and respect that exists between our two nations.

I speak of the stamp intending to honor the comic strip Mémín Pinguin. The decision to

draw attention and promote this character that would be recognized by those in the international community as racist is an act of gross insensitivity on the part of the Mexican government. In this global day and age, the Mexican authorities should have been aware of the negative international impact of this characterization of the Negro race in grotesque imagery associated with the vilest forms of racism. They should have realized that the depiction of a childish apelike cartoon intended to draw attention to racial stereotypes would be seen as racist. They should have understood that the postage stamp would be seen as a reflection of the beliefs of Mexico and that to pay honor to a character that would signal tolerance with racism is disgraceful.

While President Fox has defended this insulting portrayal as simply cultural differences, he must also understand the cultural message his government is sending to the rest of the world. Clearly, African-Americans and other African and Afro-descendant populations would see the uplifting of a black cartoon character, with monkey-like lips and head and a childish demeanor, as an attempt to malign them. At a time when the world is becoming increasingly interdependent, President Fox's government has decided to insult an entire race of humans—a race that has long suffered discrimination, insult, and abuse. Rather than highlight for the international community and the Mexican people a rich heritage of understanding and harmony, the Mexican government has chosen a symbol of offense and smear.

Yes, we should be aware of the cultural differences that exist between the people of our two countries, but that awareness requires efforts from both sides. In this Congress and past congresses, I and members of the Congressional Black Caucus have worked to erase the elements of racism that exist towards Mexicans, Hispanics, African-Americans, and Blacks. We have reached out in the spirit of cooperation and harmony to our friends in the Congressional Hispanic Caucus to fight against discrimination and discord between our people. We have pursued policies and positions that call on our leaders to decry stereotypical comments that appeal to our most basic emotions. We have united to condemn characterizations and caricatures intended to offend, defame, or marginalize our people, our race, and our community.

In the last month alone, I have been joined by a number of my colleagues in supporting an resolution to draw attention to the challenges and struggles of Afro-descendant populations in Latin America and the Caribbean. We introduced this resolution because too often the international community and the governments of Latin America and the Caribbean ignore, marginalize, and dehumanize the descendants of the transatlantic slave trade. Throughout the region, Afro-descendant populations have the lowest standards of living, the highest rates of illiteracy, the poorest standards of health care, the smallest per capita incomes, and the least amount of access to the political, social, and economic levers of power and opportunity.

It was surprising to me that, the week after the House International Relations Committee favorably marked up this resolution to recognize and support Afro-Latino and Afro-Caribbean populations, the government of Mexico would issue a postal stamp honoring an