

DISCRIMINATE AGAINST LANGUAGE MINORITY CITIZENS?

HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 29, 2006

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in opposition to the Stearns Amendment (#21). The amendment prohibits the Department expending any funds to fulfill Section 203—the Bilingual Election Assistance Provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

As a representative of one of the many multiethnic districts in New York, I am fully conscious of the need to provide bilingual assistance to our language minorities and allow all our citizens the chance to participate in the democratic process. Thus far, bilingual election assistance has facilitated voting for over 200,000 Asian Americans nationwide, and caused a 50 percent increase in the Hispanic electorate in the first decade of the adoption of this provision.

The right to vote is a fundamental characteristic of a healthy democracy. Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act gives opportunities to enable every American citizen to exercise their right to vote. Unfortunately, despite our laws, many minority voters face impediments to voting. The Stearns Amendment makes Section 203 ineffectual, removing oversight from states and localities who would be free to discriminate against tax-paying American citizens and impeding their right to vote. We can spend billions of dollars to spread democracy in Iraq but we are refusing funding to give our citizens the right to vote.

The gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) objects to the cost incurred to provide bilingual election assistance. The Oversight Hearing of the Voting Rights Act: Section 203—Bilingual Election Assistance, Part II, before the Subcommittee on Constitution, under the House Judiciary committee, revealed that 90 percent of the jurisdictions reported (in a national survey) that bilingual election assistance made up only an average of 3 percent of total election costs. Forty percent of the jurisdictions reported no extra cost for bilingual election assistance, rendering any cost-related objection to implementation of Section 203 groundless.

Eliminating Section 203 is the same as discriminating against our citizens based on their language capability. I urge my colleagues to oppose this attempt to disenfranchise American citizens. Let us not return to the era of the Jim Crow laws. As Mr. JOHN LEWIS said, "The arguments of the opponents of Section 203 are suspiciously similar to the arguments once employed for literacy tests to disenfranchise African American voters." We cannot allow a repeat of such history.

The VRA, considered by many as the most successful civil rights legislation in the country, has played a vital role in integrating all our citizens in the democratic process. Instead of proposing amendments that weaken this legislation, we must work together to immediately ensure the renewal of its expiring provisions. H.R. 9, Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks and Coretta Scott King Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendment Act of 2006, has come out of the House Judiciary Committee with a favorable voting margin of 33–1, in a rare show of bipartisanship. Let us not delay the efforts to pass this bill that has had such

an important and successful effect in safeguarding the right to vote for all our citizens.

TRIBUTE TO CORPORAL BRANDON M. HARDY, U.S. MARINE CORPS, OF COCHRANVILLE, PA

HON. JOSEPH R. PITTS

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 29, 2006

Mr. PITTS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to remember and honor Corporal Brandon M. Hardy of Cochranville, Pennsylvania, who laid down his life for his country.

At the age of 10, Brandon watched on television as the U.S. military liberated the people of Kuwait in Operation Desert Storm. This was his inspiration to dedicate his own life to serving his country. And that's what he did.

In July of 1999, directly after graduating from Octorara Area High School, Brandon enlisted in the United States Air Force. After serving for 5 years in the Air Force, Brandon joined the Marines and was sent to Iraq. On April 28 of this year, Brandon lost his life while conducting combat operations in Iraq.

Brandon Hardy understood what it means to live a life with purpose. He served a cause greater than himself. He served the cause of liberty. He gave his life so that we might be safer, and so 26 million Iraqis might have the chance to live in freedom.

In May, I had the opportunity to travel to Iraq, and each Iraqi official I met with—from the Prime Minister down to a local police chief—thanked America for sacrificing so much on Iraq's behalf. They deeply understand the difference that men and women like Brandon Hardy have made for Iraq and for the world. And we at home know that the Global War on Terror is being waged to keep us safe, as well. Marine Corporal Brandon Hardy served others and gave back to his country, and his life made a tremendous difference in the world because of it.

As an airman, Brandon served in supply management, and he completed his service with the Air Force as a staff sergeant on July 6, 2004. Brandon further demonstrated his dedication to defending our Nation when he re-enlisted in the military—but, this time, with the Marine Corps on January 19, 2005. On June 3, 2005, Brandon graduated from Delta Company, 1st Recruit Training Battalion, Parris Island, South Carolina. He was assigned to the Hawaii-based 3rd Assault Amphibian Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment as an amphibious assault vehicle crewman and was promoted to corporal on April 1, 2006.

The 3rd Assault Amphibian Battalion's mission is "to transport the surface assault elements of the landing force from amphibious shipping to inland objectives during the amphibious assault and to provide support to mechanized operations ashore. The amphibious assault vehicles are primarily utilized to transport personnel in tactical operations." The battalion is part of the 1st Marine Division, a multi-role, expeditionary ground combat force, that provides fully trained units and personnel to support Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom and other objectives in the Global War on Terrorism.

On April 28, 2006, Brandon made the supreme sacrifice for his country. He was killed

while conducting combat operations against enemy forces in Al Anbar Province in Iraq when his vehicle struck an improvised explosive device.

Brandon earned a number of awards throughout his career in both the Air Force and Marine Corps, which demonstrates his professionalism and outstanding ability as an airman and a Marine. His awards include an Air Force Achievement Medal, Air Force Good Conduct Medal, Air Force Outstanding Unit Medal with Valor, Iraqi Campaign Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, National Defense Service Medal, a Purple Heart (death), and an Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal.

May God grant to Brandon's family and his fiancée the peace that passes all understanding. My prayers and most heartfelt gratitude go out to them, and I offer them my deepest condolences. I am humbled by the dedicated service and sacrifice of their loved one, Corporal Brandon Hardy. Brandon joins the revered ranks of the many thousands of men and women throughout American history who have gone before him in battle to secure the liberty of the United States of America. He is an inspiration to us all.

PAYING TRIBUTE TO AMANDA TRUMPETER

HON. THOMAS G. TANCREDO

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 29, 2006

Mr. TANCREDO. Mr. Speaker, hundreds of students compete in the Congressional Art Competition in my district. I would like to take this time to honor Amanda Trumpeter of Chatfield High School. Her winning artwork will be on display with hundreds of her peers' artwork from around the country.

Ms. Trumpeter is outstanding student in both arts and academics. She has been accepted into the Advanced Placement teacher cadet program as well as being on Honor Roll. Ms. Trumpeter has also served as the President of the National Art Honor Society.

Ms. Trumpeter has is a proud recipient of the Minneapolis College of Art and Design summer expressions pre-college scholarship for her artistic abilities.

Mr. Speaker, it is my distinct pleasure to honor Ms. Trumpeter and her achievements here today, and wish her all the best in her future endeavors.

TRIBUTE TO NEW CITIZENS

HON. PETER J. VISCLOSKEY

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 29, 2006

Mr. VISCLOSKEY. Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure and sincerity that I take this time to congratulate the individuals who will take their oath of citizenship on July 4, 2006. In true patriotic fashion, on the day of our great Nation's celebration of independence, a naturalization ceremony will take place, welcoming new citizens of the United States of America. This memorable occasion, coordinated by the Hammond Public Library and

presided over by Magistrate Judge Andrew Rodovich, will be held at Harrison Park in Hammond, Indiana.

America is a country founded by immigrants. From its beginning, settlers have come from countries around the globe to the United States in search of better lives for their families. The upcoming oath ceremony will be a shining example of what is so great about the United States of America—that people from all over the world can come together and unite as members of a free, democratic nation. These individuals realize the great things America has to offer. They realize that nowhere else in the world offers a better opportunity for success and a good life than here in America.

On July 4, 2006, the following people, representing many nations throughout the world, will take their oath of citizenship in Hammond, Indiana: Ledwin Jose Polanco Abreu, Ruchi Prabhakar Parikh, Fiona Bage, Lyubov Ezerska, Victor Rene De Leon Lopez, Simon Gomez Zuniga, Inese Steinbahs, Edgar Leonel Lopez Juarez, Kyung Ho Yum, Mila Plavsic, Elvira Tirado, Branko Prpa, Miyoko Kawanoue, Doaa Fayez El Malh, Fabian Navarro Patino, Ghali Abdul Waheb Alsaymari, Hiraben Bhogilal Devganina, Doris Monika Cox, Bertha Romero, Grace Haesuk Lee, Vasilj Plavska, Mary Theckenath, Ilir Aliu, Young Jean Choi, Ilce Angelkoski, Elizabeth Murphy, Ernesto Berong Chan, Ivonne Golfis, Prajwal Rajappa, Georgios Mihail Krinis, Alejandro Vega, Mohammed Riaz, Eva Lazaroski, Fady Eissa El Malh, Josue Daniel Bojorquez Nunez, Barbara Ivette Quezada, Danilo Djuric, Enero Manguerra Salunga, Jose Peregrino, Maureen Alexis Stevens, Chun Gao Fred Li, John Raymond Tanner, Martha Gutierrez De Rangel, Sayyada Mushthari Begum, Aline Cortes, Sandra Elaine Fraley, Vicente Gil Baltazar, Maria Isabel Maldonado, and Aladean Naji Shalabi.

Though each individual has sought to become a citizen of the United States for his or her own reasons, be it for education, occupation, or to offer their loved ones better lives, each is inspired by the fact that the United States of America is, as Abraham Lincoln described it, a country "...of the people, by the people, and for the people." They realize that the United States is truly a free nation. By seeking American citizenship, they have made the decision that they want to live in a place where, as guaranteed by the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights, they can practice religion as they choose, speak their minds without fear of punishment, and assemble in peaceful protest should they choose to do so.

Mr. Speaker, I ask you and my other distinguished colleagues to join me in congratulating these individuals, who will become citizens of the United States of America on July 4, 2006, the day of our Nation's independence. They, too, will be American citizens, and they, too, will be guaranteed the inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We, as a free and democratic nation, congratulate them and welcome them.

KAZAKHSTAN'S CANDIDACY FOR OSCE CHAIRMANSHIP

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 29, 2006

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, next week, Kassymzhomart Tokaev, the Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan, will be visiting Washington. Given Kazakhstan's growing strategic and economic significance, his agenda with U.S. Government officials and Congress is likely to be broad-ranging. But a key focus of Minister Tokaev's discussions will certainly be Kazakhstan's bid to serve in 2009 as Chair-in-Office of the 56-nation Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Kazakhstan has been avidly pursuing this prestigious leadership post since 2003. The consensus decision must be made by this fall, in time for the December OSCE Ministerial Meeting.

While I support the idea of Central Asian leadership of the OSCE, my purpose today is to point out the very serious problems with Kazakhstan's candidacy. As many of my colleagues on the Helsinki Commission have concluded, awarding Kazakhstan the political leadership of OSCE in 2009 would be unwarranted and potentially dangerous for the Organization. President Nursultan Nazarbaev, in his opening statement at a recent OSCE meeting in Almaty, even admitted: "We do not . . . have established democratic principles." Therefore, allowing Kazakhstan to assume the chairmanship by default is not acceptable. Kazakhstan's chairmanship bid must be deferred until the country substantially implements its OSCE commitments, especially those on human rights and democratization.

Defenders of Kazakhstan's candidacy have pointed to the country's economic reforms and relative freedom, compared to the rest of Central Asia. I concur that Kazakhstan is far ahead of the police states of Turkmenistan or Uzbekistan. But that is no great achievement. Surpassing the worst of the worst does not confer an automatic right to hold the chairmanship of the OSCE which is dedicated to upholding human rights and promoting democracy.

It has long been the State Department's position "that any Chair of the OSCE must be in substantial compliance with all OSCE commitments." Over several years now, high-level U.S. Government officials have provided Nazarbaev and other Kazakh officials clear, concrete indicators of the progress necessary before serious consideration could be given to U.S. support for Kazakhstan's Chair-in-Office bid.

Yet long-promised political reforms in Kazakhstan have not materialized and the human rights climate remains poor, as documented in the State Department's annual reports. Kazakhstan's oil riches, strategic location and cooperation with the United States in antiterrorism programs cannot conceal the fact that the country remains an authoritarian state. President Nazarbaev has manipulated constitutional referendums and falsified elections to stay in power, while his relatives and friends have gained monopoly positions in the most profitable sectors of the economy. Independent and opposition media have been consistently harassed and pressured, and opposi-

tion politicians have been excluded from elections, or worse.

Such was the state of affairs before last December's presidential election, which was widely seen as a "make-or-break" moment for Kazakhstan. Unfortunately, the government failed to uphold its international commitments before, during and following the election. Despite repeated pledges from Nazarbaev to hold a free and fair contest, the OSCE observation mission stated the election "did not meet a number of OSCE commitments" due to "restrictions on campaigning, harassment of campaign staff and persistent and numerous cases of intimidation by the authorities" which "limited the possibility for a meaningful competition."

The election was a serious blow to Kazakhstan's chances to chair the OSCE. The recent establishment of the State Commission on the Development and Realization of the Programme of Political Reforms comes after the major elections, too late to have any definitive liberalizing effects. In addition, a string of events has accentuated the disturbing gap between OSCE commitments and Kazakhstan's implementation.

Last November, opposition politician and former Mayor of Almaty Zamanbek Nurkadilov was found dead in his home. According to Kazakh authorities, he shot himself three times—twice in the chest and once in the head. The official version of his death is, kindly put, implausible in the extreme.

In February, opposition politician Altynbek Sarsenbaev, along with his driver and unarmed bodyguard, was shot in an apple orchard outside Almaty. The official investigation has placed the blame for this brazen crime on Erzhan Utembaev, head of the administration of the Senate, who allegedly engaged the services of some security officers.

It is fair to say that this explanation for Sarsenbaev's death has failed to satisfy many observers. What is indisputable, however, is that anyone involved in opposition politics in Kazakhstan risks, in the worst case scenario, not merely electoral defeat but murder.

Furthermore, Kazakh officials have backed Russian plans to eviscerate the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, which, among other important democracy promoting activities, undertakes the OSCE's election observation missions. This would pose a grave threat to the OSCE as an institution and as the most credible election monitoring organization in the world.

Recent statements and actions by local Kazakh authorities against a Hare Krishna community outside of Almaty and actions to penalize minority religious communities for unregistered religious practice run counter to OSCE norms and Kazakhstan's stated commitment to inter-religious tolerance.

On March 20, President Nazarbaev praised Uzbek President Islam Karimov's handling of unrest in Andijon in May 2005. Praise for the Andijon massacre that left hundreds dead in Uzbekistan—and which moved the OSCE, the U.S. Government and international organizations to call for an independent, impartial investigation—are hardly the "reforms" one expects of a country that hopes to chair the OSCE. The forced repatriation of Uzbek refugees to Uzbekistan was equally alarming.

Just today, Kazakhstan's upper house passed a highly restrictive media law that has been criticized by the OSCE's Representative