

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

RECOGNIZING AND HONORING SOLDIERS FIGHTING THE WAR WHO ARE NOT AMERICAN CITIZENS

HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 4, 2007

Mr. RANGEL. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize soldiers who are fighting and dying in the war, but are not American Citizens and to enter into the record an article from the September 18, 2007, edition of the New York Times entitled, "Becoming an American Citizen, the Hardest Way" by Clyde Haberman.

Everyday there are men and women who are not yet American citizens fighting on the battle fields in Iraq and Afghanistan. Words alone are not enough to express my gratitude and sincere thanks to American and soon-to-be American soldiers, who made the ultimate sacrifice by putting their lives on the line everyday. Volunteering to serve in the armed forces is a brave and noble act and there are so many soldiers who do so in part due to the opportunity presented by the accelerated naturalization process available to those who enter military service. To date, there have been 103 posthumous grants of American citizenship to non-citizen war soldiers.

The sacrifice made by non-citizens who have and are currently enlisting in the armed services demonstrates the value of American citizenship. Their sacrifice and commitment is honorable and should never be forgotten. Our great country, despite some of the challenges we face, continues to be the place in the entire world where people from all over the world are inspired by democracy, justice, freedom of religion, peace, and an opportunity to pursue happiness. This explains the motivation for non-citizens to enlist in the military and put their lives on the line in hopes of achieving their American dream.

I'm grateful that I had an opportunity to assist with the granting of American citizenship to Corporal Alcántara of the United States Army, one of my constituents, who lost his life in Iraq. I grieve at the loss of the life of a young man with such a great promise and I again extend my heartfelt sympathy to his family and many friends in our community.

[From the New York Times, Sept. 18, 2007]

BECOMING AN AMERICAN CITIZEN, THE HARDEST WAY

(By Clyde Haberman)

On an August day when some Iraqi's homemade bomb tore through him, Cpl. Juan Mariel Alcántara became an American. He never got to appreciate the honor.

A little-discussed detail of this war is that some of those fighting in it as soldiers of the United States are not American citizens. Over all, about 21,000 noncitizens are serving in this country's armed forces, the Defense Department says.

Until death claimed him on Aug. 6, one of them was Corporal Alcántara of the United States Army.

He did not live long enough to acquire a richly textured biography. He was born in the Dominican Republic, reared in Washington Heights. He was 22 when the bomb—an improvised explosive device, in military-speak—ended his life and the lives of three fellow soldiers from the Second Infantry Division while they searched a house in Baquba, north of Baghdad.

At 22, Corporal Alcántara was old enough to have talked about going to college and maybe becoming a New York police officer, old enough to have a fiancee, old enough to have fathered a baby girl he never saw, Jaylani, 6 weeks old when he was killed. He was old enough, too, to have sought American citizenship.

Every year, thousands of noncitizen soldiers do that, through an accelerated naturalization process offered to those who put themselves in harm's way so that the rest of us can go about our lives untouched by war. And every year, some of those soldiers become citizens only after they have literally been wrapped in the flag.

No other war has produced anywhere near as many posthumous citizens as this one, according to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. Corporal Alcántara is the latest, No. 103. He is the 12th from New York, an honor roll that reflects today's city: 10 men and 2 women born in the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Guyana, Belize, Trinidad and Tobago, Myanmar and Nigeria.

The Americanization of Juan Alcántara came at his family's request. Representative Charles B. Rangel of Manhattan helped shepherd the application through the bureaucracy in a matter of days. Officially, the corporal was declared an American from the day he died.

There was a formal ceremony yesterday in the colonnaded Great Hall of City College of New York. Corporal Alcántara's relatives accepted his certificate of posthumous citizenship. They sat somberly in a front row: his mother, his two sisters and his fiancee, Sayonara Lopez, who fed Jaylani from a bottle.

Like scores of others filling the rows behind them, they carried small American flags. Yesterday was Citizenship Day across the country, a celebratory day for newly minted Americans. In the vaulted majesty of the Great Hall, used on occasion for such ceremonies, 242 people from 51 countries took the oath of citizenship. They were men and women like Lance Whitley, 32, formerly of Jamaica, now of the Bronx. "It's everybody's dream to become an American citizen," he said before the ceremony began.

The new citizens listened to speeches on America's grandeur and watched a large-screen video of President Bush offering congratulations.

Mr. Rangel, a critic of the Iraq war, left politics at the door. He spoke of a country that is hardly perfect but is ever working to make itself better. Once a combat soldier himself, part of the same Second Infantry Division during the Korean War, he talked about Corporal Alcántara's sacrifice and America's debt to him.

Throughout, the Alcántara family sat disconsolately. They applauded with the others and recited the Pledge of Allegiance and waved their little flags. But their hearts were elsewhere.

Maria Alcántara, the soldier's mother, is clearly a woman of stricken soul. She holds

Mr. Bush responsible for her son's death. Corporal Alcántara's Iraq duty was supposed to have ended on June 28, a day before his daughter was born. But his tour was extended as part of the president's troop "surge."

"If my son had been allowed to return, he would be alive," Ms. Alcántara said in Spanish, "and he"—meaning the president—"is guilty."

"My happiness, my everything, is gone," she said.

The mother, who is not an American citizen, also spoke of being grateful for her son's naturalization. Still, gratitude does not bring peace of mind, said one of her daughters, Fredelinda Peña. "It's not a happy moment," Ms. Peña said.

Unlike others on this day of celebration, the family wiped away tears. When the president's image appeared on the screen, Ms. Alcántara kept her head down. She could not bring herself to look at the man who she felt was the reason her son did not come home.

TRIBUTE TO BRANDIS GRIFFITH

HON. BART GORDON

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 4, 2007

Mr. GORDON of Tennessee. Madam Speaker, I rise today to express my appreciation to a very dedicated and hard working employee of the House Committee on Science and Technology. Her tenure on the Committee may have been brief, but Brandis Griffith deserves a big "thank you" for all of her hard work.

Brandis served as Deputy Communications Director for the Committee since Democrats assumed the Majority in Congress this January. She ably handled the Committee's website—both content and continued development—and assisted our press office with Member outreach and a wide range of other needs.

Working with our Committee was Brandis' first job on Capitol Hill, but her poise and flexibility in the position proved she was a fast learner and an eager participant in any task set before her.

She came to the Committee directly from a job with the University of Kansas. There, she spent six months developing her science writing skills as a research writer and media relations specialist in KU's Office of University Relations.

Prior to that, Brandis worked in broadcast journalism as a local television reporter. In her nearly five years as a reporter, Brandis worked for both KARK-TV in Little Rock, Arkansas and KFDX-TV in Wichita Falls, Texas.

Given our enthusiasm for Brandis' work while with the Committee, it may seem a bit strange that her stay was so brief. However, Brandis was offered an opportunity she simply

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Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.

could not refuse—a return to her roots in television.

This week, Brandis began her new job as a special projects producer for WJLA-TV, ABC-7 right here in the metro DC area. There, she is responsible for developing and assisting in special reports on a variety of topics.

We wish Brandis all the best in this new and exciting venture. And we thank her for her dedicated service to our Committee.

NATIONWIDE GUN BUYBACK ACT

HON. ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON

OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 4, 2007

Ms. NORTON. Madam Speaker, I was first encouraged to introduce the Nationwide Gun Buyback Act, NGBA, in 2003 after actions taken by the District of Columbia residents on Father's Day. On that day, citizens who had lost relatives and representatives of 20 advocacy and victim-support groups gathering at Freedom Plaza, a stone's throw from the White House, to declare a moratorium on murder for the Father's Day weekend. Not only did their moratorium have important symbolic value; in fact there was only one murder that weekend. Of primary importance was the fact that the moratorium was entirely citizen initiated. Residents themselves, around the country, must take responsibility for crime and not regard criminal activity as a matter for the police alone. In 2006 we had the fewest murders on record for the District of Columbia in 20 years, however, 2007 is on pace for an increase in the murder rate for the first time in 5 years, a trend reflected in many metropolitan cities, and nearly all of these killings were committed by handguns.

This bill would provide Federal funds to local jurisdictions to engage in gun buyback programs like the successful programs that have been conducted by the District of Columbia. Under the bill, funds would be distributed through the Department of Housing and Urban Development, HUD. After evaluation of proposals, added weight would be given to jurisdictions with the greatest incidence of gun violence. The NGBA would require that a jurisdiction certify that it is capable of destroying the guns within 30 days, that it can conduct the program safely, and that an amnesty appropriate for the jurisdiction will be offered. Not only individuals, but groups such as gangs and crews could take advantage of the buyback provisions to encourage them to disarm themselves.

This bill is necessary because, despite the extraordinary demonstrated success of the gun buyback program in the District, local jurisdictions have no readily available funds for similar programs. The District was forced to find money on an ad hoc basis and ran out of funds despite many residents who still desired to turn in guns. Initially, the District conducted a pilot program using funds from HUD. Confronted with long lines of residents, the Police Department then took the program citywide, using drug asset forfeiture funds. Even so, after using \$290,000, the city ran out of funds, but not out of guns that could have been collected. The guns were a "good buy," but hard-pressed jurisdictions, especially big cities, should not have to rob Peter to pay Paul when

it comes to public safety. The federal government can play a unique and non-controversial role in reducing gun violence by providing the small amount authorized by my bill, \$50 million, to encourage buybacks efforts where a local jurisdiction believes they can be helpful.

This bill is also a timely reminder as the District's handgun ban goes before the Supreme Court of the United States, the first time since 1939 that a Second Amendment case has been brought before the Supreme Court. Handguns and their impact on inner cities are indisputable. This legislation offers a common sense attempt to help local jurisdictions reduce killings. All jurisdictions, regardless of local views or laws, want to eliminate the special menace of illegal guns.

Importantly, the bill does not conflict with most stances on the controversial issue of gun control. The bill would simply allow people who desire to remove guns from their homes to do so without incurring criminal penalties for possession. Families, and especially mothers, have feared guns in their homes, but often do not know how to get rid of them. In most jurisdictions, a grandmother, petrified that there is a gun in the house for example, or her grandson, who may possess the illegal weapon, cannot turn it in without subjecting themselves to prosecution. This is reason enough for gun buyback efforts.

Like tax amnesty, gun amnesty, puts a premium on the ultimate goal. When the goal is taxes, the government puts a premium on getting payment for the amount owed. When the goal is guns, the premium is on getting deadly weapons off the streets and out of peoples' homes. This bill is entirely voluntary and does not compel anyone to give up her handgun, even one that is illegally held, it simply offers those who do not want guns in their homes an opportunity to safely dispose of them.

I encourage colleagues to support this very important legislation.

HONORING THE LOUISIANA
HONORAIR VETERANS

HON. CHARLES W. BOUSTANY, JR.

OF LOUISIANA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 4, 2007

Mr. BOUSTANY. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize and honor a very special group from south Louisiana.

On October 6, 2007, a group of 96 veterans and their guardians will fly to Washington with a very special program. Louisiana HonorAir is providing the opportunity for these veterans from my home State of Louisiana to visit Washington, DC, on a chartered flight free of charge. During their visit, they will visit Arlington National Cemetery and the World War II Memorial. For many, this will be their first and only opportunity to see these sights dedicated to the great service they have provided for our Nation.

Today I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring these great Americans and thanking them for their unselfish service.

URGING SAMHSA TO QUICKLY MOVE FORWARD WITH REVISIONS TO THE FEDERAL DRUG-TESTING GUIDELINES

HON. CHARLES W. DENT

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 4, 2007

Mr. DENT. Madam Speaker, I am fortunate to have located within my District a company by the name of OraSure Technologies. OraSure, of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, has been at the forefront in the development of diagnostic testing technologies. Specifically, it is the leader in the development of a protocol for the utilization of oral fluid samples in diagnostic testing.

Conducting drug testing on oral fluid samples, as opposed to blood, urine or hair submissions, represents a huge advancement in drug-testing technology. Drawing blood or collecting urine from a subject is invasive and time-consuming, as compared to utilizing an oral fluid sample, which can be obtained from a simple swab of the cheek. Moreover, oral fluid testing is both cost-effective and accurate. For these reasons, the use of this technology has increased. Nearly seven million oral fluid drug specimens have been successfully processed in the non-federally regulated workplace since the technology was first approved by the FDA in 2000.

Technological advancements in the testing of oral fluids for the presence of drugs have come none too soon. In a July 16, 2007 report released by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, SAMHSA, a tenant agency within the Department of Health and Human Services, SAMHSA indicated that illegal drug use is on the rise in the workplace. The survey found that nearly one in every 12 Americans had used illicit drugs in the 30 days prior to the survey. Overall this survey found that 8.2 percent of Americans are drug users, up from 7.7 percent in 1997. Much of the increase in drug use is occurring in our young people, a very real concern for America. In the 18–25 age group, SAMHSA found 19 percent had used drugs in the last month. Still concerning, the 26–34 age group had used drugs at a rate of 10.3 percent. This trend needs to be reversed. The development and availability of testing methods—such as OraSure's—that are accurate, cost-effective, and non-invasive gives employers a tool to set expectations and promote accountability.

SAMHSA recognizes the gravity of drug use in the workplace. Accordingly, it is now revising federal drug-testing guidelines to ensure that more companies and federal agencies have access to the latest advancements in drug testing technology including oral fluid-based testing. I encourage SAMHSA to move quickly with the revisions. Illegal drug use is not just a criminal justice issue; drug use has a negative effect on productivity in the work place and drug users who labor in positions vital to the public safety constitute a potential threat to homeland security. I commend SAMHSA for taking steps to decrease drug use in our society and I urge quick adoption of revisions to the outdated federal drug-testing guidelines.