

her father Stanley Niemiec, both of Harwood Heights.

The Polish American Aero-Club is, by its own claim, the largest Polish flying club outside of Poland. Its approximately 60 members form a close-knit community of enthusiasts who fly both regular planes and gliders. Like the four members killed in the crash, many of the club's members came to the United States from Poland to seek new opportunities.

During this difficult time, Chicago's Polish American community continues to demonstrate strength and resilience as it celebrates the lives of the victims. About 1,000 mourners came together for a memorial service for the victims, held at St. Constance Catholic Church in Chicago, on February 1.

Madam Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me tonight in remembering the six men and women who were killed in this tragic crash. I wish to express my sincere condolences to the families and all the friends of the victims. Our entire community has been diminished as a result of this tragedy. On behalf of all the residents of the Ninth District, I extend a hand of friendship and a heart filled with sorrow to all those who knew and loved them.

INTRODUCTION OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA BUDGET AUTONOMY ACT OF 2009

HON. ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON

OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 12, 2009

Ms. NORTON. Madam Speaker, on February 3, 2009, I intended to introduce my budget autonomy bill. I submitted the following introductory statement for the RECORD on that day. It appears that the wrong bill was attached inadvertently. Today, I correct that mistake by introducing the District of Columbia Budget Autonomy Act of 2009.

As we approach a vote on the D.C. House Voting Rights Act of 2009, it is not too early in the session to begin the next steps necessary to make the residents of the District of Columbia genuinely free and equal citizens. Other than to voting rights, the highest priority for District of Columbia residents in the 111th Congress is their right to control the funds they themselves raise to support their city. Budget control is essential to the right to self-government. Therefore, today, I am introducing the District of Columbia Budget Autonomy Act of 2009 to give the District the right to enact its local budget without annual congressional oversight.

As a practical matter, permitting the city's budget to become law without coming to Congress would have multiple and immediate benefits for both the city and Congress. For the city, a timely budget means: eliminating the uncertainty of the congressional process that has a negative effect of the city's bond rating, which adds unnecessary interest costs for local taxpayers to pick up; significantly increasing the District's ability to make accurate revenue forecasts; and reducing the countless operational problems, large and small, that result because the city's budget cannot be implemented when enacted by the city. Of the many problems that would be eliminated, none is more important than aligning the school year with the typical state government July 1st

fiscal year, instead of the congressional fiscal year, which starts in October, after the school year has begun.

Leaving the local enactment to the District would bring benefits to Congress as well. The D.C. budget often has had to come to the floor repeatedly before it passes because of controversial attachments, often of interest only to a few members who use the D.C. appropriations to promote their pet ideological issues. Members then complain about the time and effort spent on the smallest appropriations that affect no other members. No budget autonomy bill can eliminate the possibility of riders because there are countless ways to attach riders, but our bill reduces the likelihood that unrelated riders will hold the city's local budget hostage and sometimes the appropriations process itself.

I am gratified that Congress itself has moved toward the position embodied in this bill. Congressional experience with the District's budget has matured, and neither party has made changes in recent years. At the same time, increasing recognition of the hardship and delays that the annual appropriations process causes has led Congress to begin freeing the city from the congressional appropriations network. In 2006, Congress approved the Mid-year Budget Autonomy bill, offering the first freedom from the federal appropriations process, the most important structural change for the city since passage of the Home Rule Act 36 years ago. As a result, the District can now spend its local funds all year without congressional approval instead of having to return mid-year to become a part of the federal supplemental appropriation in order to spend funds collected since the annual appropriations bill. Moreover, during the past few years, appropriators have responded to our concern about the hardships resulting from delays in enacting the D.C. appropriation. I appreciate our agreement that has allowed the local D.C. budget to be in the first continuing resolution, permitting the city, uniquely, to spend its local funds at the next year's level, even though the budgets for federal agencies are often delayed for months. This approach has ended the lengthy delay of the budget of a big city until an omnibus appropriations bill is filed, often months after October 1st.

There is no risk to the Congress passing the District of Columbia Budget Autonomy Act. By definition, Congress will retain jurisdiction over the District of Columbia under Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution because the District is not a state. Since, therefore, Congress could in any case make changes in the District's budget and laws at will, it is unnecessary to require a lengthy repetition of the District's budget process here. The redundancy of the congressional appropriations process is its most striking feature, considering that few if any changes in the budget itself are made.

The original Senate version of the Home Rule Act provided for budget autonomy, and 210 years of redundant processing of a local budget and delays occasioned by the extra layer of oversight offer conclusive evidence that the time is overdue to permit the city to enact its local budget, the single most important step the Congress could take to help the District manage the city.

Members of Congress were sent here to do the business of the Nation. They have no reason to be interested in or to become knowledgeable about the many complicated provi-

sions of the local budget of a single city. In good times and in bad, the House and Senate pass the District's budget as is. Our bill takes the Congress in the direction it is moving already based on its own experience. Congressional interference into one of the vital rights to self-government should end this year with enactment of the District of Columbia Budget Autonomy Act.

HONORING THE LIFE AND MEMORY OF CHIRICAHUA APACHE LEADER GOYATHAY, ALSO KNOWN AS GERONIMO, ON THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS DEATH

HON. DALE E. KILDEE

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 12, 2009

Mr. KILDEE. Madam Speaker, as Democratic Chairman of the House Native American Caucus, it is my distinct honor to join my friend and colleague Congressman RAÚL GRIJALVA in support of H. Res. 132. This resolution honors the life and extraordinary bravery of Geronimo, the great Chiricahua Apache leader, and recognizes the 100th anniversary of his death on February 17, 2009, as a time of reflection and the commencement of healing for the Apache people.

Geronimo, a spiritual and intellectual leader, became recognized as a great military leader by his people because of his courage, determination, and skill. He led his people in a war as the Apache homeland was invaded by citizens and armies first of Mexico, and then the United States. While the Apache people were forcibly removed by the United States and interned at San Carlos, Arizona, Geronimo led some of his people out of captivity and evaded military forces for several years. Upon surrendering to the United States, Geronimo and other Apache prisoners were interned in military prisons in Florida, Alabama and Oklahoma, far from their homeland. Geronimo died on February 17, 1909, and was buried in a military cemetery at Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

The Apache people continue to honor and hold sacred Geronimo's efforts to preserve their traditional way of life and to defend their homeland. While we cannot erase the deplorable history of Indian policy in the United States to terminate tribal nations and their culture, perhaps this resolution will bring about a healing among the Apache people and their children will look back at their history and be proud that the United States paid tribute to Geronimo, a great Apache warrior.

As the San Carlos Apache Tribe and other Apache tribes across the country gather on February 17, 2009, in San Carlos, Arizona to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Geronimo's death, I wish them Godspeed as they begin their journey of spiritual healing.

CELEBRATING ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S 200TH BIRTHDAY

HON. MARK STEVEN KIRK

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 12, 2009

Mr. KIRK. Madam Speaker, today I rise to celebrate the 200th birthday of our sixteenth

president Abraham Lincoln. We celebrate his accomplishments, not only because he helped create our party but most of all we covet his ability to unite us.

As a member who proudly represents the 10th district of Illinois, today we can stand tall and proudly say we are from the Land of Lincoln.

It was Abraham Lincoln who so famously said, "Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure."

As tough as it is, our parents faced worse. The Depression, World War II, the Cold War. Americans defeated the British Empire and won the Civil War—all tougher times than these. History teaches us that each generation is tested. This is ours.

If we can learn anything from Lincoln it is that we must never lose hope—for we have faced great adversity in the past and emerged the stronger.

As we look to the future and better days, we must not forget the heroes of our past. Abraham Lincoln failed in business, lost his Senate race, and saved the Union. As we all face setbacks, his life is an example encouraging us to get up from setbacks and work to win even against long odds.

HONORING SENATOR RAYMOND LESNIAK FOR WINNING THE MEMORIAL DE CAEN INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMPETITION

HON. RUSH D. HOLT

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 12, 2009

Mr. HOLT. Madam Speaker, I rise to congratulate New Jersey State Senator Raymond Lesniak on winning the Memorial de Caen International Human Rights Competition. Senator Lesniak's address, entitled "The Road to Justice and Peace" was chosen by an international panel of judges over a number of entries from all over the world. In his speech, Senator Lesniak makes the case that the death penalty has failed, gives examples of miscarriages of justice and argues that the death penalty "serves no penal purpose and commits society to the belief that revenge is preferable to redemption."

When New Jersey became the first state to abolish the death penalty since the Supreme Court reinstated it in 1976, Senator Lesniak was the prime sponsor and mover of the bill. His passion for justice, combined with his patient, consistent leadership on the issue, had achieved victory for a cause he felt so strongly about.

It was not always the case. Ray Lesniak admits in the Introduction of his book *The Road to Abolition: How New Jersey Abolished the Death Penalty*, that he was not always a death penalty opponent. Early in his legislative career, the Senator voted to reinstate the death penalty in New Jersey. He tells of how he feared the unpopularity of a vote to abolish and was swayed by the argument that he might be perceived as "soft on crime". He gave no thought to the morality of the issue or to the possibility of executing an innocent person. He now says that "The 20 plus inter-

vening years taught me that public service should not be about seeking approval, glory or fame. Trinkets. They're nothing more than trinkets."

When Governor Corzine signed the bill abolishing the death penalty in New Jersey, the Sant'Egidio Community, which is at the forefront of the international anti-death penalty movement, arranged for the lighting of the Colosseum in Rome. The edifice that once was the scene of deadly gladiator combat and executions was bathed for 24 hours in golden light celebrating New Jersey's decision to halt executions. A fitting tribute to the work of Senator Raymond Lesniak.

Ray Lesniak is one of the longest serving and most skilled members of the New Jersey Legislature. First elected to the General Assembly in 1977, he has served in the New Jersey Senate since 1983. His legislative career is filled with initiatives that have become law and ideas that have moved our society ahead. His work has been recognized by numerous organizations. In 2002, Senator Lesniak was named "Humanitarian of the Year" by Community Access Unlimited for his legislative efforts on behalf of people with disabilities and for providing support to working families and the homeless. In 2003 he was awarded "Legislator of the Year" by the Medical Society of New Jersey for working to make health care more affordable and accessible, expanding the PAAD low-cost prescription program to cover more seniors, and expanding cancer and diabetes research and education. He was also honored by the American Cancer Society, the Polish American World and the Department of the Public Defender for his outstanding efforts in the legislature. Ray Lesniak also takes great pride in having been the Grand Marshal of the Pulaski Day Parade in New York City in 2004.

Ray Lesniak is a native of Elizabeth and a life-long New Jersey resident. He was raised in a political household where his mother, the late Stephanie Lesniak, served as a Democratic County Committeewoman for 30 years. She was his biggest fan and supporter and the inspiration for his career in government until her death in 2003 at the age of 85. She would be proud that her son has won international recognition for his achievements, but not surprised.

When Senator Lesniak accepted the award from the Memorial de Caen, he said he was proud as an American to receive this recognition for the defense of human rights. He is dedicating his first place winnings to The Road to Justice and Peace, the non-profit foundation he formed to advance the abolition of the death penalty around the globe. Ray Lesniak teaches us that a dedicated public servant, who works tirelessly for a goal, can make a difference that has a far effect. I salute Senator Lesniak for his life's work and congratulate him on winning the International Human Rights Competition. His prize winning entry follows:

I come here today not to plead a case for a victim whose fundamental human rights have been violated. But, rather, to plead the case that the death penalty violates the fundamental human rights of mankind. In my country, the United States of America, over 3,000 human beings are awaiting execution, some for a crime they did not commit. I plead the case that the death penalty in the United States, Iraq, Pakistan, Japan, wherever, exposes the innocent to execution,

causes more suffering to the family members of murder victims, serves no penal purpose and commits society to the belief that revenge is preferable to redemption.

On December 17, 2007, New Jersey became the first state in the Union to abolish the death penalty since the U.S. Supreme Court reinstated it in 1976. When Governor Jon Corzine signed the legislation I sponsored into law, he also commuted the death sentences of eight human beings. The Community of Sant'Egidio in Rome, Italy, a lay Catholic organization committed to abolishing the death penalty throughout the world, lit up the Roman Colosseum to celebrate this victory for human rights.

How was this victory achieved? First, by demonstrating that the death penalty creates the possibility of executing an innocent human being. One of our founding founders, Benjamin Franklin, quoting the British Jurist William Blackstone, said: "It's better to let 100 guilty men go free than to imprison an innocent person." Yet Governor Corzine and my legislation let no guilty person go free. It merely replaced the death penalty with life without parole, eliminating the possibility of putting to death an innocent human being. Byron Halsey could have been one such human being. On July 9, 2007, Byron walked out of jail a free man after serving 19 years in prison for a most heinous crime: the murder of a seven year old girl and an eight year old boy. Both had been sexually assaulted, the girl was strangled to death, and nails were driven into the boy's head. Halsey, who had a sixth grade education and severe learning disabilities, was interrogated for 30 hours shortly after the children's bodies were discovered. He confessed to the murders and, even though his statement was factually inaccurate as to the location of the bodies and the manner of death, his confession was admitted into evidence in a court of law. The prosecution sought the death penalty.

Halsey was convicted of two counts of felony murder and one count of aggravated sexual assault. He was sentenced to two life terms: narrowly evading the death penalty by the vote of one juror who held out against it during the sentencing portion of his trial.

After spending nearly half his life behind bars, post-trial DNA analysis determined, with scientific certainty, that Byron did not commit the murders. A witness for the prosecution at his trial is now accused of those crimes.

But for the good judgment of that one juror, Mr. Halsey might have been executed, and the real killer would never have been discovered and brought to justice. Stories like Byron's are not uncommon. Since 1973, 130 human beings on death rows throughout the United States have been released from jail for being wrongfully convicted. During that time over 1,100 prisoners were executed. How many of them were innocent? 3,309 remain on death row throughout the U.S. How many of them are innocent? How many of the innocent will be executed?

It could be Troy Davis. He's been imprisoned since 1989 in the State of Georgia for a murder he maintains he did not commit. In one of Davis's numerous appeals, the Chief Justice of the Georgia Supreme Court said, "In this case, nearly every witness who identified Davis as the shooter at trial has now disclaimed his or her ability to do so reliably. Three persons have stated that Sylvester Coles confessed to being the shooter." Coles had testified against Davis at the trial.

On September 23, 2008, less than two hours before Davis was due to be put to death by lethal injection, he received a stay of execution by the U.S. Supreme Court. On October 14 the stay was lifted and the State of Georgia issued an Execution Warrant for October