

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. Mr. Speaker. I rise today in strong support of H.R. 2661, the "Court Security Enhancement Act of 2009." I would like to thank my colleague Representative LOUIE GOHMERT for introducing this important piece of legislation, as well as the co-sponsors.

I stand in support of this legislation because it adds a simple amendment to title 18 of the United States Code, which will make a huge impact on the protection and safety of individuals performing certain official duties in the courts. This amendment will prohibit the public disclosure of certain personal information of federal judges, prosecutors, defense counsel, witnesses, or family members of these individuals. The bill will also clarify and eliminate an inconsistency that was unintentionally created by the Court Security Improvement Act, which pertained to the requirements for a Senior District Court Judge's participation in court governance. But most importantly this amendment will increase the penalty for those who violate Section 119(a) of title 18, from a maximum of five years to a maximum of ten years.

As a lawyer and a former county Magistrate Judge, as well as a Georgia State Court Judge, I hold this bill very dear to my heart. There is no time more important than the present, especially considering the recent hate crimes, like the shooting at the Holocaust Museum, that have occurred throughout the country. The United States Judiciary System stands to seek justice for all, so those who are opposed to equality for all Americans usually take their anger and hate out on innocent people. Therefore, it is only fair that there be maximum protection yielded to those who devote their careers to preserving and enforcing the founding principles of our forefathers.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 2661, the "Court Security Enhancement Act of 2009." This legislation will go a long way toward enhancing the security and integrity of our judicial system and the able men and women who comprise the federal judiciary.

Mr. Speaker, let me quote the Chief Justice of the Texas Supreme Court: "Our democracy and the rule of law depend upon safe and secure courthouses." That is because an independent judiciary is essential for a regime based on the rule of law. Nothing can do more to undermine the independence of the judiciary than the very real threat of physical harm to members of the judiciary or their families to intimidate or retaliate. In 1979, U.S. District Court Judge John Wood, Jr., was fatally shot outside of his home by assassin Charles Harrelson. The murder contract had been placed by Texas drug lord Jamiel Chagra, who was awaiting trial before the judge.

In 1988, U.S. District Court Judge Richard Daronco was murdered at his house by Charles Koster, the father of the unsuccessful plaintiff in a discrimination case. The following year, U.S. Circuit Court Judge Richard Vance was killed by a letter bomb sent to his home. The letter bomb was attributed to racist animus against Judge Vance for writing an opinion reversing a lower-court ruling to lift an 18-year desegregation order from the Duval County, Florida, schools.

In this age of the global war on terror, the danger faced by federal judges, judicial officers, and court personnel is real, as illustrated by the three murders noted above. The recent and tragic murder of U.S. District Court Judge

Joan Humphrey Lefkow's husband and mother reminds us that the danger has not abated.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 2661 increases the penalty of violating Section 119(a) of title 18, United States Code to 10 years instead of 5 years. The original bill states that it is a crime to publish on the Internet restricted personal information concerning judges, law enforcement, public safety officers, jurors, witnesses or other officers in any United States Court. The penalty for a violation was a maximum term of imprisonment of 5 years. However, H.R. 2661 will make this maximum term of imprisonment 10 years.

Additionally, the original bill increases the maximum penalty for killing or attempting to kill a witness, victim or informant to obstruct justice or in retaliation for their testifying or providing information to law enforcement by increasing maximum penalties.

The original Act provides a three-pronged legislative response to the security challenges facing our judicial institutions and personnel. First, it directs the United States Marshals Service to consult with the Judicial Conference regarding the security requirements for the judicial branch, in order to improve the implementation of security measures needed to protect judges, court employees, law enforcement officers, jurors and other members of the public who are regularly in federal courthouses.

The original bill also extends authority to redact information relating to family members from a federal judge's disclosure statements required by the Ethics in Government Act and removes the sunset provision from the redaction authority, thus making the redaction authority permanent.

Mr. Speaker, the original bill also enhanced the security and protection of judicial personnel and their families by making it a criminal offense to maliciously record a fictitious lien against a federal judge or federal law enforcement officer. This new crime and punishment is intended to deter individuals from attempting to intimidate and harass federal judges and employees by filing false liens against their real and personal property.

All in all, Mr. Speaker, this bill makes a substantial contribution to the enhancement of security of judicial institutions and personnel by increasing the penalty for violators of this Act. I urge all members to join me in supporting this beneficial legislation.

Mr. GOHMERT. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Texas for introducing the bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. SCOTT) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2661, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

The title was amended so as to read: "A bill to amend title 18, United States Code, to increase the penalty for violations of section 119 (relating to protection of individuals performing certain official duties), and for other purposes."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

EXPRESSING CONDOLENCES TO THE FAMILIES OF VICTIMS OF THE CONAGRA FOOD PLANT EXPLOSION

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 540) expressing condolences to the families, friends, and loved ones of the victims of the catastrophic explosion at the ConAgra Foods plant in Garner, North Carolina, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

H. RES. 540

Whereas the people of North Carolina experienced a devastating tragedy when a massive explosion occurred at the ConAgra Foods plant in Garner, North Carolina, shortly before 11:30 a.m. on June 9, 2009;

Whereas the 500,000-square-foot plant, one of the largest owned by ConAgra Foods, employs 900 people, 300 of whom were on site when the blast occurred;

Whereas three workers lost their lives when the explosion ripped through the plant;

Whereas employee Louis Junior Watson reentered the building to help a coworker escape and both employees died when the structure caved in;

Whereas at least 40 employees were injured, some suffering from exposure to toxic ammonia fumes and at least four with critical burns;

Whereas three brave firefighters were treated for inhalation;

Whereas North Carolina's first responders, fire, police, and EMS, were quick to the scene and prevented any further loss of life or injury, and private citizens risked their well-being to come to the aid of their friends and neighbors;

Whereas the Garner Police and Fire Departments have cooperated with North Carolina Task Force 8 Urban Search and Rescue to search and secure the building and its periphery;

Whereas agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Wake County Fire Marshal, inspectors from the North Carolina Department of Labor, and agents with the United States Chemical Safety Board have combined efforts to investigate the cause of the explosion;

Whereas the United States Environmental Protection Agency has inspected the site of the explosion to ensure no contamination spreads from the plant;

Whereas the above mentioned agencies will continue to work together with private citizens to investigate the accident, provide assistance to families of the victims, and ensure public health and safety in this disaster's aftermath; and

Whereas ConAgra has established the ConAgra Foods Garner Plant Fund in memory of those lost in this tragedy, has set up assistance and relief services for the families of the victims, and is helping support surviving workers: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives—

(1) expresses condolences to the families, friends, and loved ones of the victims of the explosion at the ConAgra Foods plant in Garner, North Carolina;

(2) honors Barbara McLean Spears of Dunn, North Carolina, Louis Junior Watson of Clayton, North Carolina, and Rachel Mae Poston Pulley of Clayton, North Carolina, who lost their lives in the explosion, and the 40 others who were injured;

(3) expresses sympathies to the people of Garner, the entire State of North Carolina,

and the Nation who grieve for the victims; and

(4) commends the heroic actions of the Garner Police and Fire Departments, the quick response of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, and all other first responders, emergency services personnel, and private citizens who responded to the crisis.

□ 1715

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. SCOTT) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GOHMERT) each will control 20 minutes. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Virginia.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the resolution under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Virginia?

There was no objection.

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia. I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, with this resolution, the House of Representatives acknowledges the tragedy that occurred at ConAgra on June 9, 2009, and extends our sympathies to the people of Garner, North Carolina, and to all of those who were touched by this tragedy. I thank the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. ETHERIDGE) for introducing this important resolution about such a sad tragedy.

Shortly before 11:30 a.m. on June 9, last Tuesday, a massive explosion ripped through the ConAgra plant in North Carolina while about 300 employees were working. The explosion killed three employees and injured at least 38 others. Three of the responding firefighters were also treated for chemical inhalation.

We wish we could turn back the hands of time and prevent this terrible tragedy. Unfortunately, we can't. And, instead, we need to do all we can to understand the cause of the explosion so we can minimize the risk of explosions like it.

This past weekend, the ATF response team announced that the explosion was caused by a natural gas leak in a room that housed vacuum pumps used for sealing snacks.

According to news reports, the ATF has not found any evidence of criminal activity. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the U.S. Chemical Safety Board, along with others, will continue with the investigation.

We express our deepest condolences to the families, friends and loved ones of the victims of this tragedy. We honor three employees who lost their lives in the explosion, Barbara McLean Spears of Dunn, North Carolina, Louis Junior Watson of Clayton, North Carolina, Rachel Mae Poston Pulley, of Clayton, North Carolina; and we also honor those who suffered injuries.

And, finally, we commend the heroic actions of the first responders, the Garner Police and Fire Departments, the emergency medical personnel, the North Carolina Task Force 8 Urban Search and Rescue, the ATF, and all other emergency services personnel and private citizens who came to the rescue. Their efforts, along with those of the ConAgra employees themselves, no doubt prevented further loss of life and injuries.

I urge my colleagues to support this important resolution and reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. GOHMERT. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise in support of the resolution, which expresses the heartfelt condolences of this body to the families, friends and loved ones of the victims of the June 9 explosion at ConAgra Foods plant in Garner, North Carolina.

As the resolution notes, the people of North Carolina experienced a devastating tragedy with a massive explosion occurring at the plant shortly before 11:30 a.m. The 500,000 square foot plant employed about 900 people, 300 of whom were on-site when the blast occurred. As a result of the blast, three workers lost their lives when the explosion ripped through the plant.

One brave employee, Louis Junior Watson, selflessly re-entered the building to try to help a coworker escape. Tragically, neither employee was able to escape the plant before the structure collapsed.

Along with Mr. Watson, the resolution honors the memories of Barbara McLean Spears, Rachel Mae Poston Pulley, who were the other two people who perished in the plant. We know that at least 40 employees were injured in the accident. Some suffered from exposure to toxic ammonia fumes, and at least four received critical burns.

After the blast occurred, North Carolina's first responders, including firefighters, police officers, and emergency medical technicians, quickly arrived on the scene. Their timely efforts probably prevented many other losses of life or injury. This resolution, as my colleague from Virginia noted, commends them for their sacrifice and courage as well.

In addition to the first responders, we also recognize the private citizens of the proud community of Garner who risked their well-being to come to the aid of the families and friends and neighbors of those in the tragedy.

I join Mr. ETHERIDGE, Chairman SCOTT, and my colleagues in the House to express our sincere sympathies to the people of Garner, the entire State of North Carolina, and the Nation who grieve for the victims.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the sponsor of the resolution, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. ETHERIDGE).

Mr. ETHERIDGE. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my good friend, Chair-

man CONYERS, and Majority Leader HOYER for expediting this resolution to the floor today.

Mr. Speaker, last Tuesday, June 9, the town of Garner, in my district, changed forever. A natural gas leak, as you've heard, ignited a massive explosion at the ConAgra Food plant, causing the collapse of a significant portion of the structure. Three employees died in the explosion; and close to 40 others were injured, four, with critical burns.

This resolution remembers the lives of Barbara McLean Spears of Dunn, North Carolina, Louis Junior Watson and Rachel Mae Poston Pulley, both of Clayton. They were all hardworking Americans who did just what we do every day: they got up, they went to work on that fateful day, Tuesday, to make their lives better and to do their part to contribute to America's work force and success of this Nation.

One of those workers, Louis Junior Watson, was particularly heroic. Though he had a means of escape, Watson chose to remain in the building to aid his coworker, Barbara McLean Spears, who had fallen. This extraordinary man is truly a hero and exemplifies the spirit of community and kinship that has strengthened his community.

Mr. Watson and his wife, Terri, would have celebrated their wedding anniversary yesterday. They had a 14-year-old son, and 16-year-old and 18-year-old daughters. Louis Junior Watson was laid to rest at 11 a.m. today.

More than 1,000 people attended the Sunday funeral services held for Rachel Mae Poston Pulley. Ms. Pulley was a mother of seven and a grandmother of six.

Barbara McLean Spears, who was married one year ago to her partner of 15 years, Anthony Spears, also leaves behind her 61-year-old mother, Bertha McLean, two brothers and two nieces. She was also laid to rest yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring their lives and their loved ones who are left behind.

This resolution also recognizes Mayor Williams and his staff, our first responders, fire, police, EMS, who were quick to the scene and prevented even further loss of life or injury. Those emergency personnel worked tirelessly on behalf of our communities; and we thank all of them, including private citizens who stepped up in this great time of need. Four of those brave firefighters, as you've already heard, were injured in the line of duty on Tuesday, and we commend their heroic efforts.

The citizens in and around my district have come together in the wake of this devastation, and it has been remarkable. I'm heartened and encouraged by the show of support from my fellow North Carolinians.

Our small communities are enhanced by businesses like ConAgra, which employed 900 people at this plant. I'm pleased to learn that they've set up a recovery fund for the victims, and they've been distributing groceries to their employees in need.

I know that ConAgra is working to rebuild the plant, and I look forward to the day when the employees can return to their work. There's a great demand for the products that ConAgra is producing in Garner, and I am pleased that these snacks and other food products are made in the Second District of North Carolina.

Mr. Speaker, let us remember those who we have lost and be thankful for those who were saved. Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims and their families and the entire ConAgra community because they are suffering.

On Friday night I participated in a vigil in Garner to remember and honor the victims. I was honored to attend and pleased with the tremendous outpouring of support.

At 11:30 tomorrow, exactly 1 week after the accident, Mayor Williams, the city of Garner, and all the community will join together with other individuals in other communities who were touched by the accident in a moment of silence to commemorate this disaster. I hope that we will have Congress' voice represented there with the passage of this resolution, and I urge my colleagues to support this important and necessary and timely resolution.

Mr. GOHMERT. Mr. Speaker, I will continue to reserve.

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to another colleague from North Carolina, Mr. PRICE.

Mr. PRICE of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join colleagues here today in offering condolences to the families and friends and coworkers of Barbara McLean Spears, Louis Junior Watson and Rachel Mae Poston Pulley, the three workers who tragically lost their lives in an explosion at the ConAgra plant in Garner, North Carolina on June 9.

This area, Garner, North Carolina, is an area that I formerly represented as their Congressman. It's now represented by our colleague, BOB ETHERIDGE; and I want to thank BOB for sponsoring this resolution here today and enabling us to come together in this time of tribute.

Our sympathy goes out to the families of the victims, but also to the 40 other ConAgra employees who were injured in this plant's explosion and collapse. Some of them have severe burns. They have other serious injuries. We wish them a successful recovery, and we thank the medical providers, including the Burn Center at UNC Chapel Hill, who are doing so much to treat these victims.

Often it does take a tragedy like the ConAgra explosion to publicly highlight the courageous work of our first responders. We commend those who responded to this explosion. There are many stories of bravery that prevented further injury or loss of life. The firefighters, the police, the emergency medical services of Garner and Wake County and many surrounding commu-

nities that heeded the call to rescue the ConAgra plant employees in a quick and safe manner. So we're very indebted to them and grateful to them. These first responders put us first, put our communities first every day.

There are also many private citizens who risked their lives helping plant employees evacuate, who gave selfless assistance to their suffering neighbors. That's a testament to the character and the strength of Garner's community.

The ConAgra plant, as my colleague, Mr. ETHERIDGE, has said, is a cornerstone of the Garner and Wake County community. It was built as a sausage plant nearly 50 years ago. As we move forward, remembering the victims of this tragedy, and the way that this plant provided the livelihood for so many people, we do hope the plant is rebuilt, and that employees can return to work. And we're heartened that such plans seem to be under way.

We do need to remain vigilant, of course, in our efforts to improve workplace safety. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms has concluded their investigation, finding, fortunately, no evidence of criminal intent. The Chemical Safety Board investigation is ongoing. We need to get to the bottom of this. We need to understand what happened; and we need, of course, to adopt practices and policies that lead to safer facilities in the future and avoid this kind of tragedy.

So, Mr. Speaker, in closing, we honor the memories of those that we have lost, give thanks for those who have been spared, and join in sympathy for the victims and their families.

Mr. GOHMERT. Mr. Speaker, I would just urge my colleagues to support the resolution, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume and thank my colleagues from North Carolina for bringing this tragedy to our attention and giving us the opportunity to convey our condolences.

I urge my colleagues to support the resolution.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. SCOTT) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, 540.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. ETHERIDGE. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair

declares the House in recess until 6:30 p.m. today.

Accordingly (at 5 o'clock and 30 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess until 6:30 p.m.

□ 1831

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Ms. LEE of California) at 6 o'clock and 31 minutes p.m.

REPORT ON RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 2847, COMMERCE, JUSTICE, SCIENCE, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2010

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida, from the Committee on Rules, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 111-155) on the resolution (H. Res. 544) providing for consideration of the bill (H.R. 2847) making appropriations for the Departments of Commerce and Justice, and Science, and Related Agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2010, and for other purposes, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

REPORT ON RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 2346, SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2009

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida, from the Committee on Rules, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 111-156) on the resolution (H. Res. 545) providing for consideration of the conference report to accompany the bill (H.R. 2346) making supplemental appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2009, and for other purposes, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, proceedings will resume on motions to suspend the rules previously postponed.

Votes will be taken in the following order:

House Resolution 430; H.R. 2325; H.R. 729; and House Resolution 540, in each case by the yeas and nays.

Remaining postponed suspension votes will be taken later in the week.

The first electronic vote will be conducted as a 15-minute vote. Remaining electronic votes will be conducted as 5-minute votes.

EXPRESSING CONDOLENCES TO ITALIAN EARTHQUAKE VICTIMS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The unfinished business is the vote on the motion to suspend the rules and agree to