

“House GOP takes step back on Confederate flags.”

Unbelievable—it is a shame. It is really a shame that House Republicans last night, very late last night, without warning, attempted to turn back important progress on taking down this terrible and divisive symbol.

This, of course, happens just weeks—days, literally—after nine Americans were slain in an historic Black church in Charleston, South Carolina. A terrible and tragic massacre committed by an evil individual, who wrapped himself in that very symbol, and celebrated the hate that it stood for.

I attended the funeral of Reverend Clementa Pinckney and, with other Members of Congress, grieved with that community in their pain. I saw that community asking themselves a question: Why, why does that hateful symbol, that flag, continue to fly over their State capitol?

On the same day that the South Carolina Legislature expressed the will of its people and the American people and voted overwhelmingly to take down this horrible symbol, on the same day that South Carolina voted to take down that hateful symbol, a Member of this House of Representatives came to this floor and offered an amendment to preserve that symbol in America's national parks—what a shame.

Amazon, Walmart, and Sears all have taken that symbol out of their stores and no longer sell it; but the Republican leadership allowed and would have allowed on voice vote an amendment to stand that would preserve the right to have that symbol sold in our national parks—what a shame.

I hope the American people are watching and paying attention to this because it is a moment of truth, I think, for this Congress. I hope and I pray that Democrats and Republicans—I know the feelings of the Democratic Caucus; we spoke about it this morning—but I hope will be joined by Republicans on the other side in turning back this awful amendment that would say horrible things about the progress that we hope that we had made just in the last few weeks.

I ask Americans to join us. Use social media, #takeitdown. Express yourself. Join with us in rejecting this horrible symbol of hate. Let's take it down.

THE CONFEDERATE FLAG, A SYMBOL OF PRIDE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. KING) for 5 minutes.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to address you here on the floor of the House of Representatives and being recognized.

I have been listening to this debate over the last week or so, and it has troubled me considerably to watch divisions being driven between the American people over symbolism that has now been redefined by a lot of Members of the opposite party.

I regret, like all of us do in this country, the tragic and brutal and evil murders of the nine people in Charleston, South Carolina. I pray for them and their families. They stood up and showed us an example of faith that I think surpasses any that I have seen in my lifetime by forgiving the killer.

I am not to that point in my faith, Mr. Speaker, the least that I can tell, but that was very moving. They didn't want to see a division created, they wanted to heal, and they wanted to see Christ's love come out of Charleston.

Charleston is a wonderful and beautiful city, and I don't know where I would go to find nicer people if I couldn't go actually home, Mr. Speaker, so I couldn't say enough good about that.

I have listened to this rhetoric that has poured forth over these days. It appears to me that it is now being turned into something that is division, rather than unifying.

We unified in our grief with the people of South Carolina, the people of Charleston. Now, we are seeing the Confederate battle flag be put up as a symbol to be redefined as something different than is understood by the majority of the American people.

□ 1130

I grew up in the North, Mr. Speaker, and the Confederate flag always was a symbol of the pride of the South from where I grew up. My family and my predecessors and my ancestors were abolitionists, and they went to war to put an end to slavery.

Mr. Speaker, I have now in my hand a leather-bound New Testament Bible that was carried in the shirt pocket of my great uncle, John Richardson, and it is written inside here. It was presented to him on the eve of his departure for the war in July of 1862.

He walked home 3 years to the day with this Bible in his shirt pocket, it having protected him. It has fly specks on it from laying open by the campfire. It has verses that are written in it. I have found his picture, his musket, his bayonet, his belt buckle, and his ink file.

That is what is left of this man who committed himself to putting an end to slavery. Yet, his cousin, my five times great-grandfather, was killed in that effort. Many gave their lives to put an end to slavery.

I was standing before the Lincoln Memorial, reading his second Inaugural Address, and I will read that into the RECORD, Mr. Speaker. This component is from Lincoln's second Inaugural Address of March 4, 1865, when he said:

Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's 250 years of unrequited toil shall be sunk and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said 3,000 years ago, so still it must be said: “The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.”

Mr. Speaker, these are not disputed numbers. The numbers of Americans

who were killed putting an end to slavery and saving the Union: 600,000.

Another number not disputed is the number of Black Africans who were brought to what is now the United States to be slaves: 600,000. I take you back to the words “until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword . . . ‘The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.’”

A huge price has been paid. It has been paid primarily by Caucasian Christians. There are many who stepped up because they profoundly believed that they needed to put an end to slavery.

This country has put this behind us. It has been through this brutal and bloody battle. We have come back together for the Reconstruction, and we have healed this country together. I regret deeply that we are watching this country be divided again over a symbol of a free country.

When I go to Germany and see that they have outlawed the swastika, I look at them and I think: We have a First Amendment. That can't happen here in the United States because we are open enough. We have to tolerate the desecration of Old Glory, the American flag.

Yet, we have people here on the floor who say they are offended by a symbol. They are the ones who are putting it up for all to see, and then they are saying that we should outlaw that so the American people don't have a chance to see our heritage.

Everything about America's history is not glorious. Everything about our history is not right in our judgment, looking back in hindsight, but none of us know what it was like for the people who lived during that time, in that era.

We can accept our history. We can be proud of our history. We can unify our country. We can grieve for those who were murdered, and we can preserve our First Amendment rights.

SEMINAL MOMENTS IN TIME

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. AL GREEN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. AL GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, there are seminal moments in time.

The bombing of Pearl Harbor was a seminal moment in time that will live in infamy. The crossing of the Edmund Pettus Bridge was a seminal moment in time that will live in history. It was a turning point in the civil rights/human rights movement.

There are seminal moments in time.

The House of Representatives confronts a seminal moment in time. Will we allow the healing to continue or will we try to roll back the clock?

There are seminal moments in time.

If we take this vote—and I hope that we will not, and there is an indication that we may not—the taking of the vote, in and of itself, can be a seminal moment in time.

A vote to legitimize the Confederate flag—the battle flag—would be a seminal moment in time for the United

States House of Representatives—a flag that represents slavery, a flag that represents division.

We have come together in this country under a flag that represents unity, one that stands for liberty and justice for all, the flag of the United States of America. This is not that flag.

We confront seminal moments in time.

In South Carolina, the South Carolina Senate and House of Representatives stood tall when confronting a seminal moment in time, and the Confederate battle flag will be removed.

I was so proud to hear a relative, a descendant, of Jefferson Davis take to the floor of the House of Representatives in South Carolina and proclaim that the flag must come down.

Seminal moments in time.

We have our opportunity to do that which is right, to do what Dr. King talked about when he said that the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.

We can bend the arc of the moral universe toward justice or we can turn back the clock, understanding that this is a symbol that causes a lot of pain for a lot of people. This symbol would have prevented my having the opportunity to stand here if it had prevailed.

I call upon all people of goodwill to please do the righteous thing, not just the right thing—do the righteous thing.

How can you possibly vote for this after you saw the relatives of the nine who were killed stand in court before a judge and before the person who was the assailant—the person who actually killed people—and say, “I forgive you”? We have forgiven those who have fought to enslave us. We have forgiven.

I forgive you.

How could you possibly now decide that you will legitimize this symbol of hatred, of slavery, of a bygone era of a time when people were not even proclaimed to be human beings in the minds of many?

So this is a great opportunity for this House of Representatives to answer the clarion call of justice and to do as Dr. King indicated, to bend the arc of the moral universe towards justice.

But it is also something else. It is an opportunity to see where we are.

There will be a moment in time beyond this time when someone will look back upon these moments and he will look to see where we stood.

Where did you stand when you had the chance to stand for righteousness? Where were you when you had an opportunity to vote to recognize justice as opposed to the injustice associated with this symbol?

C.A. Tindley was right. So I will leave you with these words:

Harder yet may be the fight; right may often yield to might. Wickedness awhile may seem to reign; Satan's cause may seem to gain. There is a God that rules above with the hand of power and a heart of love. When we are right, He will help us fight.

I stand against this symbol. I stand for the American flag. I stand for justice.

IS ISIS A NATIONAL SECURITY THREAT TO THE UNITED STATES?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. POE) for 5 minutes.

Mr. POE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, today the terrorist army of ISIS is stronger than ever. It maims, rapes, pillages, burns, and beheads in its zeal to commit religious genocide against anyone who disagrees with them.

ISIS controls and manipulates the minds of thousands of foreign fighters, including those who come from the United States. This is done arrogantly through American social media companies.

The U.S.' answer to the ISIS threat? Well, let's see what it is.

Part of the current U.S. strategy is to train foreign mercenaries to fight against ISIS. It has had a yearlong American budget of about \$500 million.

The program is to equally fund equipment and to train these so-called moderates from Syria to fight ISIS. I call them mercenaries.

However, the Secretary of Defense of the United States—Carter—admitted that, even after this 1 year of training, the United States has only trained 60—six, zero—of these moderate Syrian rebels.

If I do my math correctly, Mr. Speaker, we are spending about \$4 million apiece on these 60 fighters to go and fight, supposedly, ISIS.

This is embarrassingly pathetic. The greatest nation that has ever existed sees ISIS as such a threat that we are going to send 60 folks over to try to take care of them.

Ironically, there are more Americans who are fighting with ISIS than we have rebels who have been trained to fight against ISIS.

The United States obviously is not taking ISIS seriously. ISIS even mocks the United States and its 60 fighters on, once again, American social media.

There is more.

The President has recently admitted that the United States really doesn't even have a complete strategy against ISIS. Now, isn't that lovely?

The question is, Mr. Speaker: Is ISIS a national security threat to the United States? That is the question. That is the question that has to be answered by the administration and by Congress, and a decision needs to be made by the administration.

It is time for the administration to pick a horse and ride it. If ISIS is a threat, then we must have a plan to defeat them, then actively implement the plan, and defeat ISIS.

Mr. Speaker, the Commander in Chief needs to lead. He needs to command or ISIS will continue its reign of terror in the Middle East and in other parts of the world.

And that is just the way it is.

THE CONFEDERATE BATTLE FLAG

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. ELLISON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. ELLISON. Mr. Speaker, if there is any doubt in the mind of any person as to what this Confederate battle flag stands for, I urge people not to listen to me. I urge you to listen to the secessionists themselves.

Here is a quote from the Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union.

It reads:

This sectional combination for the submersion of the Constitution has been aided in some of the States by elevating to citizenship persons who, by the supreme law of the land, are incapable of becoming citizens, and their votes have been used to inaugurate a new policy hostile to the South and the destruction of its beliefs and safety.

Those persons were Black people. That new policy that was hostile to the South was ending the enslavement of the millions of people based on their race.

Here is a quote from the Vice President of the Confederacy. I think he can speak authoritatively as to what other Confederate flags mean. Vice President Alexander Stephens said:

Our new government is founded upon exactly the opposite of the American idea. Its foundations are laid—its cornerstone rests—upon the great truth that the Negro is not equal to the White man, that slavery, subordination to the superior race, is his natural and normal condition.

That is what the Vice President of the Confederate States said under banners like this one as they were fighting and offering the lives of their own children to maintain slavery.

□ 1145

This is what the flag represents.

I yield to the gentleman from Rhode Island (Mr. CICILLINE).

Mr. CICILLINE. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, last night the South Carolina House of Representatives finally approved legislation to take down this symbol of hatred and bigotry and the darkest time in our Nation's history.

It is shameful that less than 24 hours after the State of South Carolina took this important step for progress and equality that the United States House of Representatives would consider an amendment that would allow the Confederate flag to be placed in National Park Service cemeteries.

Let's be clear. This amendment is a symbol of hate, and anyone who supports its being in a place of honor is imposing an insult on anyone who has experienced racism in their lives or believes in America's founding principles of equality, justice, and freedom.

150 years ago hundreds of thousands of brave soldiers died to save our Union and to defeat all the ugly beliefs that the Confederate battle flag represents.

Dr. Martin Luther King was fond of saying that the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice. Our country has come far since