

Mr. Speaker, as talks continue into the weekend, I am hopeful that negotiators will remember that no deal is better than a bad deal.

CONGRESSIONAL PROGRESSIVE CAUCUS: CONFEDERATE FLAG

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. HARDY). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2015, the gentlewoman from New Jersey (Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Mr. Speaker, earlier today, the distinguished gentlewoman from California introduced a privileged resolution, not too different from the one my friend and colleague Mr. THOMPSON brought to the floor just last week. Mr. Speaker, that resolution called for the immediate removal of the Confederate battle flag from the Capitol grounds. And my colleagues across the aisle moved quickly to banish that resolution to die in committee.

Earlier today, the original home of the Confederacy argued, but agreed, that the Confederate flag and the history it represents belong in a museum. They decided that the flag should not serve as a bright, waving reminder of the discrimination and disparity of treatment for people of color that still lingers in communities across our country—hateful sentiments that resulted in the loss of nine lives at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston.

They decided that that flag should not hang high above the halls of State government, forcing all those who see it to wonder whether the emotions and ideology so closely tied to it are present in the hearts and minds of those who serve in that statehouse.

They decided that the flag had flown long enough, and that taking it down would be one small but critical step in healing the deep divisions present in their State.

They stood against the symbol of bigotry, they stood against years of complacency, and they stood for the principles of equality, justice, and unity for this Nation. They will take that flag down tomorrow.

But Republican leadership in this body refuses to do that. They took the path of cowardice and turned a blind eye to the struggles of generations of Americans. They used backhanded tactics last night to muddle the language of the Interior and Environment Appropriations bill, including language intended to satisfy Members who would rather see that flag fly.

The fallout from that language led to the disappearance of that bill from today's scheduled debate and resulted in the chairman of that subcommittee disowning the final product.

Leader PELOSI's resolution offered another opportunity for my colleagues across the aisle to stand on the right side of history, but they turned that chance down resoundingly.

Mr. Speaker, let's not mince words. While I stand with my brothers and sisters of the South, the Confederacy itself fell far below even common decency for fellow man, violating human rights and taking advantage of every part of the lives of the men and women they enslaved, sometimes for profit and sometimes purely for pleasure.

The Confederacy used extreme violence and terrorism to subjugate millions purely on the basis of the color of their skin, and started the deadliest war ever to take place on U.S. soil to defend a disgraceful system. That flag is a symbol of the Confederacy's effort to keep that system intact. That is why, Mr. Speaker, before the holiday, I stood in this very spot on the floor to denounce the hate, bigotry, malice, discrimination, and division that the Confederate flag stands for.

But I also reminded my colleagues that a symbol, while significant, is only a stand-in for something far stronger. A symbol will never have the strength of a bullet fired from the barrel of a policeman's gun at an unarmed Black man because of ingrained bias. A symbol will never have the impact of a prison sentence that permanently prevents a young person from becoming a full-fledged member of society, a fate far more likely to befall a person of color. A symbol will never eradicate Black and Latino wealth like the predatory loan structures that put their homes underwater in a recession at rates that dwarfed their White peers.

But if we are not even willing to get rid of a symbol, as this body has so clearly expressed its disinterest in doing, how can we possibly move on to the real underlying problems, issues like education for young people, affordable housing, and access and training for jobs.

Removing a symbol is an easy thing to do, an easy thing that would have signaled one country, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Today, Republican Members across the aisle did more than just stand up for that symbol of hate and that symbol of degradation. These Members treated me and those issues that are vitally important and extremely sensitive to me in a manner that was both disrespectful, insensitive, and very hurtful, Mr. Speaker.

□ 1915

Nonetheless, this will not go away. We will continue to raise this issue every day that it is needed, every week that it is needed, every month that it is needed, until my colleagues can recognize that a simple act of decency, the removal of this symbol of hate and disrespect and slavery, a mark on our history that needs to be removed.

Once we do that, Mr. Speaker, once we do that simple, little thing, and that is to stand together in taking down that ugly symbol that that flag represents, then we will be able to get on with the serious and important work that needs to be done to lift up this economy on behalf of all people.

That will be education for all people, and higher education that is affordable for all people, Mr. Speaker. It will be affordable housing. It will be jobs and job training. It will be adequate preschool programs and afterschool programs. It will be recreation programs and character-building programs.

It will be safe communities. It will be equal opportunity for all because that is the country that we live in, and that is the reason that we have this Congress, and that is the reason that I am here.

I, for one, will not be silent on this issue until we see this change that the 21st century demands.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from California (Mr. BECERRA).

Mr. BECERRA. I thank the gentlewoman from New Jersey for yielding, and I stand with her and what she has just said.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes, we forget how privileged we are, the Members of Congress, who have a chance to stand in this hallowed Chamber. We are the representatives of the people. We get elected to speak for the American people. We get elected to act on behalf of the American people.

Very few Americans, throughout the history of our country, have had an opportunity to stand right here where we are today and say that we actually can get things done, not just for the American people, for the people of the world, because there has never been a democracy like the United States of America.

There has never been a country that has had an opportunity to do so much for so many, and there has never been a democracy that has a chance to prove to the world that we know how to get this done and do it right.

Mr. Speaker, as we stand here in this Chamber, we have to admit, we have to be prepared on behalf of the American people to stand up, to step up, to do what is right, and to do what the American people expect us to do.

Now, they know we have to speak for them, but they don't want us just to talk. The time to just talk on so many issues has come and gone.

Mr. Speaker, I think the American public would agree that the time to just talk about what to do about the Confederate battle flag has come and gone. The time to just talk about what to do about the Confederate battle flag came 150 years ago when the chance to heal was upon us.

As President Lincoln said in his second inaugural address: "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds."

If we needed to talk, Abraham Lincoln said it all. Lincoln wanted us to act, to move, to get things done for the American people.

The time to talk came after one after another Black church was suspiciously burned down throughout this country, and we knew something was going on.

That was the time to talk about what we needed to do.

The time to talk was before a man, driven by hate and animosity, on June 17, entered Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, to carry out a vicious plan to start a race war—because we have seen these signs of danger growing for the disregard for life.

That would have been a time to talk and heal, before that man, crazed with hate, walked into Mother Emanuel Church; but, Mr. Speaker, after nine innocent, God-loving, God-fearing Americans were taken from their families, from their church where they were praying, from their country, the time to just talk is over.

It is time for us to step up. It is time for us to stand up because that is why we get elected, to do what the people expect us, on their behalf, to do.

320 million Americans cannot get up and say, It is time to remove the Confederate battle flag from any grounds where we reflect the governance of a democracy. They encharge us to do that, and the time to talk has ended.

When we see on the floor of the House, last night, an opportunity for the Congress to register itself and say, We hear you, America, you want us to act, and you want us to take down that Confederate battle flag in whatever symbolic way we can, including selling that symbol here in the Capitol, we had an opportunity.

In fact, we had an opportunity that was golden because it seemed like we had a bipartisan vote to do exactly that; but, in the dead of night, something happened. Some people decided to hide behind the dark cloud and change what we had just done.

When we take to the floor here, we may only be talking, but as my colleague from New Jersey said, we are going to do much more because the time to talk has just ended. It is time to act. It is time to step up.

We all have an opportunity. We all have an obligation to stand up.

Tomorrow morning, at 10, the Confederate battle flag will finally come down from above the South Carolina Capitol once and for all. Mr. Speaker, the Confederate battle flag has no place but a museum in the 21st century.

Let us all together, those of us privileged to be in this Chamber, along with our fellow Americans, forge a path forward as a Nation that celebrates our bright future, not our dark past. It is time to take the Confederate battle flag down. It is time for us to step up.

It is not a time to hide behind procedural motions, behind votes in the dead of night, and it certainly is not time for us to assemble a bipartisan group of Members to talk about what we need to do about the Confederate battle flag.

It is time to do the work of the people, and they want us to act. There should be no doubt about it. The American people are speaking very forcefully. Don't just talk; act.

Mr. Speaker, I say with great pride, having served in this Chamber for many years, I believe the people's Representatives in the people's House are getting ready to act; and no act during the dead of night, no effort to derail this effort will succeed because the people have spoken and spoken in the words of the nine people who are no longer with us.

We do it with grace, but we will do it with power because we understand this is not a time to just talk; it is a time to act—and we will act.

I thank the gentlewoman for yielding.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Representative BECERRA, thank you so much for taking your time and being here with us today, and thank you so much for your eloquent words.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. HAHN).

Ms. HAHN. Mr. Speaker, I would like to also thank the gentlewoman from New Jersey for allowing me to add my voice to this discussion.

Certainly, all Americans were devastated by the brutal murder of nine people, including Senator Pinckney, while they were attending Wednesday night Bible study at Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston. Their killer was motivated by racism, bigotry, and even had pictures of himself displaying Confederate memorabilia.

The people of South Carolina and their political representatives have engaged in serious conversations about race, about healing, and how to deal with their State's history.

South Carolina's Governor signed a bill a few hours ago to take down that Confederate battle flag from the grounds of the State capitol where it has flown for 50 years, and as South Carolina was moving to take down that flag, some right here were moving in the opposite direction.

Earlier today, I took to this House floor to express my outrage that my friends on the other side of the aisle had offered a surprise amendment last night to allow the Confederate battle flag to be displayed in our national parks and at Federal cemeteries, just a couple of days after this body voted to remove that Confederate battle flag from our national parks.

Many of my colleagues, including those participating in this Special Order tonight, joined in speaking out; and as a result, I think we succeeded in stopping them from bringing that amendment to a vote.

We are here now because we recognize that it is not enough to keep the Confederate flag from being displayed or sold at national parks. Right now, here on the grounds of the United States Capitol, where we and our staffs work and visitors from all over come to visit, the Confederate battle flag and other images of the Confederacy are still visible; and that, we believe now, is unacceptable.

I am proud to serve in the United States House of Representatives, which

is known as the people's House; yet here in the hallways of our office buildings and elsewhere in the House of Representatives, including this side of the Capitol Building, there are State flags on display which include imagery of the Confederacy.

Many of the residents of the wonderfully diverse district which I represent in California and many other Americans from all across our country find these images offensive, insulting, painful, even threatening.

If we are to truly be representative of the people and if we want the people, all of the people of this great Nation, to feel welcome and comfortable here in the people's House, then we cannot continue to have divisive symbols associated with hatred, with bigotry and oppression on public display.

Therefore, let me add my voice to those of my colleagues in calling for the removal from the House of Representatives of any flag containing any portion of that Confederate battle flag.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. I thank the gentlewoman from California for sharing her wisdom with us and her encouragement.

Mr. Speaker, I really am touched by what we experienced in Charleston, South Carolina, the kind of grace and mercy that the families of those who were felled by this domestic terrorist on the church in Charleston, South Carolina.

I know that, even in this Chamber, there are friends that I have across the aisle who would gladly vote with me and vote with my colleagues to remove that flag and that imagery and that symbolism from any of our government properties if they would simply be given the chance.

In honor and respect of the loss of life and the grace and mercy and the healing and forgiveness that was demonstrated by the families of those who lost their lives in Charleston, South Carolina, and in recognition of the courageous steps that the South Carolinians did in voting to take down that flag and for the Governor to sign that and to watch, tomorrow, when history is being made, to take down that flag, I pray that our House is given the opportunity to vote our conscience because I know that I have colleagues on the other side of the aisle that feel the same way that I do, that believe in the greatness of this country and that believe in justice and liberty for all and believe that those symbols that remind us of the mistakes that we have made belong in the annals of history, to be remembered, but never to be repeated.

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

□ 1930

CONFEDERATE BATTLE FLAG

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BABIN). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2015, the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. KING) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.