

My parents were not born American. That means that they had to affirmatively choose to take up the values and the principles and the ideals that are the foundation of our citizenship. They did so gladly and they did so naturally. I sometimes think that those Americans who had to choose to be American, that had to take that affirmative step, perhaps they have a greater appreciation for what this country offers.

At an early age, my parents taught me respect for our Nation, her leaders, and her most distinct symbol, Old Glory. I learned that from an early age. But I have to admit, Madam Speaker, I never really appreciated just how important the flag was as a symbol until I left this country, until I lived and worked overseas in a land where there was no Declaration of Independence, there was no Bill of Rights, the sort of wonderful document that we are all talking about and debating and interpreting today.

As my wife Sue and I traveled around East Africa is where we were, every time we saw Old Glory, whether it be at embassies or at private homes, our spirits were lifted by what it symbolized not just for us but for the rest of the world, nations and people struggling to be free. If we fail to protect the flag, that symbol both here and abroad is tarnished. And I submit to my colleagues, each time the flag suffers physically, our stature in the eyes of the world suffers just as clearly.

If we fail to protect the flag, people around the world may believe that we do not care, that we have become tired or complacent or self-doubting. The flag is a symbol. But in a time where the eyes of the world are upon us, symbols matter; and no symbol matters more than our flag. Our constituents are not complacent. Our constituents care. Every survey ever done tells us that. They want to protect the flag. So should we.

Finally, I think part of the debate is going to be what the First Amendment means today. And I think it is easy to draw lines between action and thought and expression. We have done so in the past. We have created hate crime laws. We do have laws for destruction of symbols like gravestones and synagogues and churches. We have done that.

I urge us all today, as we go through this debate, to follow the principles and respect what my colleague has suggested and support this House resolution.

Mr. WATT of North Carolina. Madam Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. PAUL).

(Mr. PAUL asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PAUL. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me the time.

Madam Speaker, I rise in opposition to this amendment. I have myself served 5 years in the military, and I have great respect for the symbol of

our freedom. I salute the flag, and I pledge to the flag. But I served my country to protect our freedoms and to protect our Constitution. I believe very sincerely that today we are undermining to some degree that freedom that we have had all these many years.

We have not had a law against flag desecration in the 212 years of our constitutional history. So I do not see where it is necessary. We have some misfits on occasion burn the flag, which we all despise. But to now change the ability for some people to express themselves and to challenge the First Amendment, I think we should not do this carelessly.

□ 1645

Let me just emphasize how the first amendment is written. "Congress shall write no law." That was the spirit of our Nation at that time. "Congress shall write no laws."

We have written a lot of laws since then. But every time we write a law to enforce a law, we imply that somebody has to arrive with a gun, because if you desecrate the flag, you have to punish that person. So how do you do that? You send an agent of the government to arrest him and it is done with a gun. This is in many ways patriotism with a gun. So if you are not a patriot, you are assumed not to be a patriot and you are doing this, we will send somebody to arrest them.

It is assumed that many in the military who fought, but I think the gentleman from North Carolina pointed out aptly that some who have been great heroes in war can be on either side of this issue. I would like to read a quote from a past national commander of the American Legion, Keith Kreul. He said:

Our Nation was not founded on devotion to symbolic idols, but on principles, beliefs and ideals expressed in the Constitution and its Bill of Rights. American veterans who have protected our banner in battle have not done so to protect a golden calf. Instead, they carried the banner forward with reverence for what it represents, our beliefs and freedom for all. Therein lies the beauty of our flag. A patriot cannot be created by legislation.

I think that is what we are trying to do. Out of our frustration and exasperation and our feeling of helplessness when we see this happen, we feel like we must do something. But I think most of the time when we see flag burning on television, it is not by American citizens, it is done too often by foreigners who have strong objection to what we do overseas. That is when I see it on television and that is when I get rather annoyed.

I want to emphasize once again that one of the very first laws that Red China passed on Hong Kong was to make flag burning illegal. The very first law by Red China on Hong Kong was to make sure they had a law on the books like this. Since that time they have prosecuted some individuals. Our State Department tallies this, keeps records of this as a human rights violation, that if they burn the flag, they

are violating human rights. Our State Department reports it to our Congress as they did in April of this year and those violations are used against Red China in the argument that they should not gain most-favored-nation status. There is just a bit of hypocrisy here, if they think that this law will do so much good and yet we are so critical of it when Red China does it.

We must be interested in the spirit of our Constitution. We must be interested in the principles of liberty. We should not be careless in accepting this approach to enforce a sense of patriotism.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Madam Speaker, I yield 15 seconds to the gentleman from California (Mr. CUNNINGHAM).

Mr. CUNNINGHAM. I would address my colleague that just spoke in the well. Is it not true that the gentleman votes "no" on over 90 percent of the issues and finds reason not to vote for issues on this House floor? Is that true?

Mr. PAUL. If the gentleman will yield, I think that is correct, because probably 90 percent of the time, this Congress is doing things that are not constitutional, and I think they are very legitimate.

Mr. CUNNINGHAM. My point is made. I thank the gentleman.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Madam Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. KELLY).

Mrs. KELLY. Madam Speaker, I want to share with Members some words written by a third grader:

"I feel so proud whenever I see my country's flag flying over me. The red's so bold the white's so clear the brightness of the blue is all so dear. I love my country my family, too, but most of all I love the red, white and blue."

Madam Speaker, these words were written because this child was allowed to value our flag, to understand the importance of the symbolism embodied in our flag and its importance in representing the values of our country.

Madam Speaker, the child who wrote these words, Carolyn Holmes, is grown now. She still values this country. She still values our flag. Madam Speaker, we must teach our children values.

If we allow the desecration of our flag, we allow those who desecrate it to teach our children a values lesson which may yield bitter fruit.

Madam Speaker, this issue is important. We worry about how to help our children learn the basic values for a civil society. Respect is one of the most important of these. Children need to be taught respect. Respect for the flag seems a very good place to begin. Let it spread from there to respect for others and their ideas.

It is important to remember here that it takes the States to ratify what we do and it takes the voice of the people in those States. So let the people speak. Let them speak.

Madam Speaker, the flag desecration amendment should be passed.