

truth that dissent in Cuba is regularly and brutally repressed; that political prisoners are regularly incarcerated in institutions that deprive them and their fellow inmates of basic life necessities; and most importantly, that the people of Cuba, like all people, long for liberty and the opportunity to take care of their families and loved ones free from repression by their own government.

Dr. Biscet embodies the hopes and dreams of 11 million Cubans; we are here today to honor his efforts and his fellow Cubans' hopes and dreams by introducing this bill, which would award Dr. Biscet a Congressional Gold Medal for his tireless work on behalf of the Cuban people.

It is our desire that this gesture will serve not only as a signal of hope to Dr. Biscet, who—charged with “insulting symbols of the fatherland,” “public disorder” and “instigation to commit crimes”—sits today in the notorious ‘Cuba Si’ prison as a symbol of the Cuban regime’s oppression, but also as a signal to that government and those like it around the world that we are watching, and that liberty ultimately always prevails.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

HONORING HENRIETTA BELL WELLS

• Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, today I wish to pay my respects to one of my constituents, Mrs. Henrietta Bell Wells, who passed away on February 27, 2008.

Mrs. Wells was the last surviving member of the famous debate team from Wiley College in Marshall, Texas, whose story is told in the recent film “The Great Debaters.” She was a remarkable woman whose early success in challenging gender and racial barriers was followed by many years of faithful service. She will be missed but certainly not forgotten. Her life is truly an inspiration.

I ask that an obituary that was published in The New York Times yesterday be printed in the RECORD.

The material follows:

[From the New York Times News Service, Mar. 12, 2008]

(By Douglas Martin)

Henrietta Bell Wells, the only woman, the only freshman and the last surviving member of the 1930 Wiley College debate team that participated in the first interracial collegiate debate in the United States, died Feb. 27 in Baytown, Texas. She was 96.

Her friend Edward Cox confirmed the death.

The story of the team, called the Great Debaters in last year’s movie of the same name, began in 1924 at Wiley College, a small liberal arts college in Marshall, Texas, founded a half-century earlier by the Methodist Episcopal Church to educate “newly freed men.”

Melvin B. Tolson arrived at the all-black school that autumn to teach English and other subjects. He also started a debate team.

Tolson, who would win wide distinction as a poet, saw argumentation as a way to cul-

tivate mental alertness. Wiley was soon debating and defeating black colleges two and three times its size.

In 1930, Tolson decided to break new ground. He managed to schedule a debate with the University of Michigan Law School, an all-white school. Wiley won. Other debates with white schools followed, culminating with Wiley’s 1935 victory over the national champion, the University of Southern California.

Tolson’s stunningly successful debate team was portrayed in “The Great Debaters,” directed by Denzel Washington. Describing the cinematic young debaters in The Chicago Sun-Times, the critic Roger Ebert wrote, “They are black, proud, single-minded, focused, and they express all this most dramatically in their debating.”

In the fall of 1930, Henrietta Bell, who would later marry Wallace Wells, was a freshman in an English class taught by Tolson. The professor urged her to try out for the debate team, because she seemed to be able to think on her feet. She was the first woman on the team.

In an interview with The Houston Chronicle in 2007, she said the boys “didn’t seem to mind me.”

But the work was far from easy. Bell attended classes during the day, had three campus jobs and practiced debating at night. The intensity of debating was reflected in Tolson’s characterization of it as “a blood sport.”

But the hard work paid off. In the interview with The Chronicle, Wells declared, “We weren’t intimidated.”

Henrietta Pauline Bell was born on the banks of Buffalo Bayou in Houston on Jan. 11, 1912, and raised by a hard-pressed single mother from the West Indies. When riots broke out in 1917 over police treatment of black soldiers at a World War I training camp, the family’s house was searched. Wells recalled being unable to try on clothes in segregated stores.

She did not debate in high school but was valedictorian of her class. She earned a modest scholarship from the YMCA to go to Wiley, Episcopal Life reported.

In the spring of 1930, Bell, her teammates and her chaperone arrived at the Seventh Street Theater in Chicago. It was the largest black-owned theater in town, because no large white-owned facility would host a racially mixed audience, according to an article in The Marshall News-Messenger. Wells remembered a standing-room-only crowd.

She wore a dark suit and had her hair cut in a boyish bob. In an interview with Jeffrey Porro, one of the screenwriters of “The Great Debaters,” she felt very small on that very big stage. “I had to use my common sense,” she said.

She remembered Tolson urging her to punch up her delivery. “You’ve got to put something in there to wake the people up,” he had said.

Wells told The Chronicle, “It was a non-decision debate, but we felt at the time that it was a giant step toward desegregation.”

She debated for only one year, because of the need to work for money. She kept up with drama, which Tolson also coached. After graduating from college, she returned to Houston, where she met Wallace Wells and married. He was a church organist and later an Episcopal minister. She worked as a teacher and social worker.

Wells advised Washington on the movie, using her scrapbooks as visual aids. She urged him to play Tolson, something he at first was not inclined to do. He called her “another grandma.”

Wallace Wells died in 1987. Wells left no immediate survivors.

Her advice to today’s students was straightforward: “Learn to speak well and learn to express yourself effectively.”

She learned this lesson directly from Tolson, whom she called her crabbiest and best teacher. He was known for issuing intellectual challenges immediately upon entering the classroom.

A typical salutation: “Bell! What is a verb?”

TRIBUTE TO THE DRAKE UNIVERSITY MEN’S BASKETBALL TEAM

• Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I am here today to commend the Drake University Men’s Basketball team on its outstanding and unexpected success this past season. Drake is a school of less than 5,000 students in Des Moines, IA. Today the Drake community is experiencing basketball success the likes of which it hasn’t seen in over 35 years. Coached by Keno Davis, the Bulldogs won the regular season Missouri Valley Conference, the Missouri Valley Conference tournament and earned a berth to the NCAA tournament. They were picked to finish ninth in the conference and instead roared to a 28-4 overall record. It was only the second winning season the Bulldogs have enjoyed in the past 20 years. And it’s the first time since 1971 that they will play in the NCAA tournament. Drake also finished the regular season ranked 20th in the Nation and beating a tough Illinois State team by 30 points in the MVC tournament final. It’s been a long drought, but the Bulldog nation, from Iowa to Washington, DC, to California, could not be prouder.

This upstart team has quite a story. Two starters, Adam Emmenecker and Jonathon Cox are former 3-year walk-ons who recently earned basketball scholarships. They are also incredibly successful academically. Drake started off the season well and won the mythical State championship by beating the University of Iowa, Iowa State University and the University of Northern Iowa. They snapped a 20 game losing streak at the University of Iowa. Drake also had great success in Missouri Valley Conference play. The Bulldogs cracked the Top 25, too, and traveled to Butler University and beat the eighth ranked team on their home court.

This Drake team exemplifies what it means to be a student-athlete. Five Drake players, Adam Emmenecker, Josh Young, Klayton Korver, Brent Heemskerck, and Jonathon Cox were named to the MVC’s scholar-athlete team. Four of the five Bulldog starters have a GPA above 3.0. In addition, Emmenecker was named the ESPN Scholar Athlete of the year for NCAA Men’s Division I basketball, with a 3.97 GPA and four majors.

It goes without saying that behind a great college team are great coaches and administrators. Keno Davis is in his first year as a head coach. He’s been named the Missouri Valley Conference Coach of the Year, and Sporting News Coach of the Year. Just 36 years old, Keno learned from his father, Dr. Tom Davis, who retired as Drake’s head coach in 2007, and was a longtime head coach at the University