

TEXAS INDEPENDENCE DAY

HON. GENE GREEN

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 1, 2012

Mr. GENE GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, Friday, March 2, 2012, marks Texas Independence Day. 176 years ago, the Texas Declaration of Independence was ratified by the Convention of 1836 at Washington-on-the-Brazos.

This is an important day for Texas and patriotic Texans observe this occasion with great pride.

In 1824, a military dictatorship took over in Mexico abolishing the Mexican constitution. The dictatorship refused to provide trial by jury, freedom of religion, public education for their citizens, and allowed the confiscation of firearms, this last one being the most intolerable, particularly among Texans.

The Texas Declaration of Independence states that Texas' government had been "forcibly changed, without their consent, from a restricted federative republic, composed of sovereign states, to a consolidated central military despotism."

It stated that because of the injustice of Santa Anna's tyrannical government, Texans were severing their connection with the Mexican nation and declaring themselves "a free, sovereign, and independent republic . . . fully invested with all the rights and attributes" that belong to independent nations; and a declaration that they "fearlessly and confidently" committed their decision to "the Supreme Arbiter of the destinies of nations."

The Texas Declaration of Independence was fully justified because this military dictatorship had ceased to protect the lives, liberty, and property of the people of Texas.

Failure to provide these basic rights violated the sacred contract between a government and the people, and Texans did what we still do today—stand up for our rights by declaring our independence to the world.

In response, the Mexican army marched to Texas waging war on the land and the people, enforcing the decrees of a military dictatorship through brute force and without any democratic legitimacy.

As future President Sam Houston and other delegates signed the Texas Declaration of Independence, General Santa Anna's army besieged independence forces at the Alamo in San Antonio.

Four days after the signing, the Alamo fell with her commander Lt. Colonel William Barrett Travis, Former Tennessee Congressman David Crockett, and approximately 200 other Texan defenders.

All these men were killed in action, a heroic sacrifice for Texan freedom. If this tragedy were not enough, weeks later Santa Anna's army massacred over 300 unarmed Texans at Goliad on March 27.

In a dramatic turnaround, Texans achieved their independence several weeks later on April 21, 1836. Roughly 900 members of the Texan army overpowered a much larger Mexican army in a surprise attack at the Battle of San Jacinto. I am proud to represent the San Jacinto Battlefield and State Park.

That battle is memorialized along the San Jacinto River with the San Jacinto Monument. The monument is larger than the Washington Monument here in DC.

Today we give thanks to the many Texans that sacrificed for the freedom we now enjoy. God bless Texas and God bless America.

CELEBRATING HARRY BELAFONTE'S 85TH BIRTHDAY

HON. LAURA RICHARDSON

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 1, 2012

Ms. RICHARDSON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to ask the House to join me in extending warm wishes to Mr. Harry Belafonte, a great American who celebrates his 85th birthday today.

Harry Belafonte is not only the consummate entertainer, but he is a tireless civil rights advocate. He has used the fame and wealth that he earned early on in his career as a musician and actor to support and advance the cause of civil and human rights.

Harry Belafonte was born Harold George Belafonte, Jr., at Lying-in Hospital, New York City, New York. He was the son of Melvine, a housekeeper, and Harold George Belafonte, Sr., a Jamaican who worked as chef in the Royal Navy. From 1932 to 1940, he lived with his grandmother in the village of Aboukir in her native country of Jamaica. When he returned to New York City he attended George Washington High School after which he joined the Navy and served during World War II.

At the end of the 1940s, he took classes in acting at the Dramatic Workshop of The New School in New York with the influential German director Erwin Piscator alongside Marlon Brando, Tony Curtis, Walter Matthau, Bea Arthur, and Sidney Poitier, while performing with the American Negro Theatre.

Belafonte started his career in music as a club singer in New York, a job he took to help pay for his acting classes. The first time he appeared in front of an audience he was backed by the Charlie Parker band, which included the great Charlie Parker himself, Max Roach, and Miles Davis among others. At first he was a pop singer, launching his recording career on the Roost label in 1949, but later he developed a keen interest in folk music, learning material through the Library of Congress' American folk songs archives. With guitarist and friend Millard Thomas, Belafonte soon made his debut at the legendary jazz club The Village Vanguard. In 1952 he received a contract with RCA Victor.

His first wide-release single, which went on to become his "signature" song with audience participation in virtually all his live performances, was "Matilda," recorded April 27, 1953. His breakthrough album *Calypso* (1956) became the first LP to sell over 1 million copies. The album introduced American audiences to Calypso music and Belafonte was dubbed the "King of Calypso." Belafonte was also the first African American man to win an Emmy, with his first solo TV special *Tonight with Belafonte* (1959).

More than a musician and entertainer, Belafonte was a civil rights activist and tireless leader. Belafonte's political beliefs are greatly inspired by the man that he still views to this day as his mentor: singer and activist Paul Robeson. He strongly opposed racial prejudice, segregation, and discrimination in the United States. Like Robeson and other black

entertainers, Belafonte's success in the arts did not protect him from racial discrimination, particularly in the American South. As a result, Belafonte refused to perform in the South from 1954 until 1961.

Also in the 1950s, Belafonte met a young Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on the latter's historic visit to New York. From that eventful first meeting until the day Dr. King was assassinated, Belafonte and Dr. King maintained a deep and abiding friendship.

Dr. King, Jr., said of Belafonte, "[his] global popularity and his commitment to our cause is a key ingredient to the global struggle for freedom and a powerful tactical weapon in the Civil Rights movement here in America. We are blessed by his courage and moral integrity."

Mr. Belafonte could always be counted on to be there when the need was greatest. He was there to provide the money to secure Dr. King's release from Birmingham City Jail. He raised thousands of dollars to post the bail needed to release other jailed civil rights protesters. He financed the Freedom Rides, supported voter registration drives, and helped to organize the March on Washington in 1963.

During "Freedom Summer" in 1964, Belafonte financed the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, SNCC, flying to Mississippi that August with \$60,000 in cash and entertaining crowds in Greenwood with his "Banana Boat Song." In 1968, Belafonte appeared on a Petula Clark primetime television special on NBC. In the middle of a song, Clark smiled and briefly touched Belafonte's arm, which made the show's sponsor, Plymouth Motors, nervous. Plymouth wanted to cut out the segment, but Clark, who had ownership of the special, told NBC that the performance would be shown intact or she would not allow the special to be aired at all. American newspapers published articles reporting the controversy and, when the special aired, it earned high ratings.

Belafonte has continued his involvement in the civil rights struggle to this very day. Recently, Belafonte spoke at the 50th SNCC Anniversary Conference.

Belafonte did not limit his fight for justice to the United States. He has spent his life and career advocating for human rights around the entire world. For example, disturbed by cruel events unfolding in Africa as a result of war, famine and drought, Belafonte set in motion the wheels that led to "We Are the World," the iconic song and music video organized by Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie, that raised millions in support of famine relief efforts in Africa. In 1987, Belafonte accepted the appointment as UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador—the second American to hold this position—the first was Danny Kaye.

Belafonte has continued to devote himself globally to civil and human rights issues, focusing in particular on the United States and Africa. "My social and political interests are part of my career. I can't separate them," said Belafonte. "My songs reflect the human condition. The role of art isn't just to show life as it is, but to show life as it should be."

Belafonte's international civil rights accomplishments also include his contribution to ending the oppressive apartheid in South Africa and securing the release of his friend, Nelson Mandela, imprisoned for twenty seven and a half years.

Belafonte was appointed by President John F. Kennedy Cultural Advisor for the Peace