We in this Congress need to follow our constitutional responsibility and never send our young men and women to war unless we debate it and we declare war on the floor of the House.

HONORING THE LIFE OF ARTIST THORNTON DIAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Alabama (Ms. SEWELL) for 5 minutes.

Ms. SEWELL of Alabama. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to honor one of America’s most prolific and self-taught artists, Mr. Thornton Dial of Bessemer, Alabama.

Today at the age of 86, Thornton Dial has lived, worked, and created art in Alabama for his entire life. From childhood, Dial was creating symbolically dense pieces of art by using castaway objects, anything he could find in his environment: pieces of wire, scrap metal, tin cans, tree roots. He used his environment to define his environment.

Dial’s work provides a forceful and compelling narrative of the most insidious challenges and remarkable triumphs of African American history in the Deep South. His work contains layers of rich history and reflects on race and class struggles that he witnessed in the Deep South.

Dial rose to prominence in the 1990s while in his sixties through his large-scale assemblages, paintings that were made of scrap metal, pipes, very interesting visual interpretation of the history and politics that he saw around him.

Dial is described as having been one of the most amazing art biographies in art history. He is described as being a very quiet man, a listener who dressed impeccably. What he lacked in terms of formal education he more than made up for in his highly visual and historic vocabulary.

Dial’s created brilliance is truly illuminating and inspiring. Dial has stayed in Alabama in the heart of the Seventh Congressional District to live and work his entire life. He was born in 1928 in Sumter County, Alabama. He was one of 12 children. And in childhood, he built his own toys because, as he said: We didn’t have much.

Thornton began full-time farming at the age of 5. In his early teens, he was sent to work with his aunt in Bessemer, Alabama, where he attended Sloss Mining Camp. His peers made fun of him for his large size and for being “country.” His teachers told him that he would never amount to much.

I want you to know that we in the Seventh Congressional District are extremely proud of Thornton Dial because we know that he really interpreted what he saw around him in the Deep South. He interpreted it in a very creative way, and only now is he gaining such preeminence for that form of art.

Dial never really made a living as an artist. He worked for over 30 years at the Pullman Standard factory. Yes, he made boxcars for a living.

“People have fought for freedom all over the world,” he said. “I try to show that struggle. It is a war to be fought. We are trying to win it.”

In his time off from the Pullman factory, Dial would escape to his garage or backyard and create masterpieces out of whatever he could find. Out of fear that people would laugh at his art, he would bury it. Later he would dig it up and deconstruct it and reuse materials for new masterpieces.

Dial began to dedicate himself to his artwork in 1981. He founded Dial Metal Patterns, a garden furniture business, with his sons in 1983, after the Pullman Factory closed.

Dial’s handmade designs were discovered by Lonnie Holley, a neighboring Black artist, in 1987. Holley brought Bill Arnett, an artist himself and a collector of outsider world-class art, with Atlanta to see Dial’s work. Arnett helped him to get national attention about his art. The two, finally, working together, agreed on a price for his first sculpture.

Initially, Dial offered Arnett the piece for $20, and Arnett refused the low price. He said to Mr. Dial that this piece deserves more than $20. They agreed on $200. This was the first transaction that Mr. Dial had as an artist.

Dial’s work has been the subject of exhibitions across this country. At the New Museum of contemporary art and the American Folk Art Museum in New York. His work can be found in more than 15 public collections, including those of, among others, the High Museum of Art in Atlanta and the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston. Many people now collect his art. An art museum of African American art, the Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington. Many people now collect his art. An art museum of African American art, the Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington.

Dial’s powerful artwork stands out in the world of highly degreed artists. As a self-taught artist, he was never sent to art school. Dial has no formal education. He learned on the job.

To put it another way, VA management at Phoenix HCS met 16 percent of its wait time goal. We have actually known about it for years. Republicans—and I have been in office here a year and a half—and, I imagine, Democrats have been complaining for years about this because they see it in their districts. But nothing has been done. And some will say, well, Congress hasn’t appropriated the right money. Three times the VA has missed its wait time goal since 2001. The VA has not met its wait time goal since 2001. The VA has not met its wait time goal since 2001. The VA has not met its wait time goal since 2001. The VA has not met its wait time goal since 2001. The VA has not met its wait time goal since 2001.

Falsified data reported last year by Phoenix HCS showed veterans waited, on average, 24 days for their first primary care appointment. Falsified data has said that they waited an average of 24 days, however, the recent IG report found that veterans actually waited, on average, 115 days for their first primary care appointment, with approximately 94 percent of those waiting more than 14 days, which was the stated goal.

Mr. Speaker, 115 days for their first appointment. That is the appointment where you go to talk to the doctor and tell him what is wrong or what you think is wrong and he starts making an assessment. That is not treatment. That is just an appointment with the doctor. Mr. Speaker, 115 days.

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When people say to you, as a Representative, there are things wrong with the Federal Government, Mr. Speaker, this is what is wrong with the Federal Government. Even after cooking the books, the stated goal of an average 14-day wait time was not met. Even after that.

Now, I was proud to vote for Chairman MILLER’s VA Accountability Act last week, but it is a shame—I don’t know what it is—that it takes an act of Congress to fire somebody in the Federal Government. If you are the Secretary and you find somebody that has done something wrong—and in these cases, potentially criminal—and you can’t fire them, what is going on here?

Now, this is not a new circumstance. We have actually known about it for years. Republicans—and I have been here a year and a half—and, I imagine, Democrats have been complaining for years about this because they see it in their districts. But nothing has been done. And some will say, well, Congress hasn’t appropriated the right money. Three times the VA has missed its wait time goal since 2001. The VA has not met its wait time goal since 2001. The VA has not met its wait time goal since 2001. The VA has not met its wait time goal since 2001. The VA has not met its wait time goal since 2001. The VA has not met its wait time goal since 2001. The VA has not met its wait time goal since 2001.

However, I am going to read from the executive summary of the inspector general’s allegations:

“Allegations at the Phoenix HCS include gross mismanagement of VA resources and criminal misconduct by a VA senior hospital leadership, creating systemic patient safety and quality issues that resulted in possible wrongful deaths. While our work is not complete, we have substantiated significant delays in access to care negatively impacted the quality of care at this medical facility.”

Mr. Speaker, that is breathtaking. That is breathtaking. This is our Federal Government.

VA SCANDAL

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

Mr. PERRY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring awareness to the outrageous, the almost unimaginable findings from the ongoing VA inspector general’s review of the Phoenix Health Care System and now some two dozen other facilities.

The stated VHA goal is a 14-day wait for a first-time primary care appointment—14 days, 2 weeks. It is a little bit more for some. But it seems appropriate, reasonable for many. That is their goal. Whether I agree with it or not, that is their goal.