

ROLLING THUNDER

HON. TED POE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 5, 2018

Mr. POE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, each Memorial Day, families all over the nation plan their weekend barbecues and look forward to enjoying a long weekend. But despite the festivities, many of these folks don't remember why we have the day off of work, and why we celebrate this national holiday.

But for the members of Rolling Thunder, in Houston, Texas, there is no question. Each year, they join together to help remind Americans across the nation of just why it is that we celebrate Memorial Day.

Rolling Thunder is a group of patriots who have made it their mission to honor our military heroes by bringing awareness through a motorcycle demonstration in Washington, D.C. While many members are veterans, not all are; some are just patriotic Americans who wish to do their part. They unite together to demand accountability for our POWs and MIAs to be identified and brought home.

In 1987, a group of Vietnam Veterans gathered together to discuss the thousands of reported sightings of Americans still living in captivity. They were disturbed by the neglect from our government. So, they decided to do something to force the government and media to acknowledge the horrific abandonment of our men and women overseas. After much brainstorming, the veterans came up with a unique idea. They began reaching out to family, friends, fellow veterans, and advocates to assemble a group of patriots willing to stand up for our soldiers.

In 1988, on Memorial Day, 2,500 men and women rode to our Nation's Capital on their motorcycles. Decked out in leather, wearing shades and bandanas, waving Old Glory, and riding 500 plus pounds of steel, they were a terrifying but inspiring bunch. The sound of over a thousand bikes riding in unison reminded many of the bombing campaign against North Vietnam dubbed Operation Rolling Thunder. Very powerful. Since then, that small group of veterans became known as Rolling Thunder. They are right thinking Americans with big hearts.

The number of riders has increased every year, and now nearly 900,000 members belong to the Rolling Thunder. There are currently 90 chapters throughout 32 states. Two of those chapters are back home in my great city—Houston, Texas. It's hard to find a more patriotic state than Texas. With 8 out of 10 Texans enlisting to serve our nation, it's not a surprise that Texans are joining the "Ride for Freedom" this year.

This year, like every year, on Memorial Day, Rolling Thunder chapters join together and ride to our Nation's Capital. These demonstrations are known as the "Ride for Freedom". This year, they celebrated the 31st Ride for Freedom. The ride begins at the Pentagon on Memorial Day. At noon the riders, all at once, start their motorcycles and begin the ride to The Wall to show their continued support for our missing and fallen soldiers. They pay their respects.

Although the group may have started to bring attention to our POWs/MIAs from Vietnam, they want to make sure all soldiers are

remembered. Today, the organization has branched out to include all wars and recognize that we still have an accumulated estimate of 86,788 unaccounted United States veterans.

Mr. Speaker, Rolling Thunder rides for our soldiers whose lives were given in pursuit of a great cause, American Freedom. I am proud to recognize these angels on bikes with hearts bigger than Texas. They make a difference and represent all that is right and good in America.

And that's just the way it is.

TRIBUTE TO SHEYANN WEBB
CHRISTBURG

HON. TERRI A. SEWELL

OF ALABAMA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 5, 2018

Ms. SEWELL of Alabama. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Sheyann Webb Christburg, a leader in the American Voting Rights Movement. A trailblazer in every sense of the word, Sheyann was only eight years old when she dared to march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma on Bloody Sunday. She courageously participated in the March from Selma to Montgomery which led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Today, we pay tribute to Sheyann as one of the youngest foot soldiers for justice.

Sheyann was born in Selma, Alabama, in 1956 to parents John and Betty Webb as one of eight children. Growing up in public housing, she attended a segregated public school. As Sheyann walked to her third grade class one morning in January 1965, she stumbled across a meeting at Brown Chapel AME Church. There, she saw an uncommon sight for Alabama in the 1960s—both black and white people congregated together outside of the church. Noticing how powerful the moment was and never one to shy away, a curious Sheyann stepped inside to find Dr. Martin Luther King's aide Hosea Williams speaking to the crowd. Williams' words instantly caught her attention: "If you can't vote, then you're not free, and if you ain't free, children, then you're a slave".

Sheyann's participation in the mass meetings were not free from criticism. Upon returning to school, she was reprimanded for being late and attending potentially dangerous meetings. The Birmingham Church bombing had just taken place a few years prior, and her parents were worried that she would be a target for violence. Being involved in the Voting Rights Movement was dangerous, as it could jeopardize her parents' jobs or get them kicked out of public housing. But that did not stop her, Sheyann was determined to blaze her own trail towards freedom.

For her 9th birthday, Sheyann asked her parents to register to vote and stood in line with them at the local Dallas County courthouse for an entire day before they were registered. Sheyann was not deterred by her teachers either. Despite their warnings, she continued to skip class becoming the only child to regularly attend the mass meetings at Brown Chapel.

Sheyann was often accompanied to the after-school meetings by her schoolmate friend Rachel West. The two girls became particularly close with Dr. King himself. "What do

you want?", he would often ask the girls. "Freedom!" They would yell back, going back and forth louder and louder until they would all collapse with laughter. "Do you young ladies have your marching shoes on?", he would ask them. Sheyann always had her marching shoes on.

On March 7, 1965, Sheyann marched with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) across the Edmund Pettus Bridge on what later became known as Bloody Sunday. She was beaten with billy clubs and sprayed with tear gas. Despite being terrified by the violence that erupted, she was determined to continue to march. Sheyann kept attending mass meetings at Brown Chapel AME Church and marched again with SCLC towards Montgomery on March 21, 1965. Her enthusiasm was arguably too much even for Dr. King, who told her she did not have to march all the way to Montgomery and had her picked up by a van and driven back to Selma.

Sheyann's activism continued long after the marches. In junior high school, she became one of the first black students to integrate into an all-white school in Selma. She was pushed down stairs, called bad names, and was suspended from school—all while receiving no support from the administration. But Sheyann remained unbought and unbossed in her activism throughout her life, graduating from Tuskegee Institute in 1979.

Today, Sheyann continues her outreach and civic engagement through her company, KEEP Productions Youth Development Mentoring and Modeling Program, where she works with youth ages two to eighteen to help them blaze their own trails to success. Because Sheyann knows firsthand how impactful childhood opportunities can be, her program assists youth in helping them build self-esteem, confidence, and find purpose in their lives. In addition, she also works with youth groups across the State of Alabama to organize development workshops and training programs that help young people obtain the skills they need to succeed.

Sheyann remains vocal about her experiences in the Voting Rights Movement, writing the book 'Selma, Lord, Selma' which was eventually turned into a movie. She speaks to numerous religious, community, and educational institutions throughout the world and regularly appears on national talk shows.

On a personal note, I am privileged to have known Sheyann Webb Christburg all my life as a native daughter of Selma and my former babysitter. Sheyann has made such an incredible imprint on my life as a mentor, confidante and friend. To know Sheyann, is to be inspired by Sheyann. Her courage in the face of adversity, her moral compass on issues of social justice and her heart of gold are her trademark and standard bearers. I know that it is because of her influence on my life that I am Alabama's first Black Congresswoman. To say thank you doesn't seem an adequate reflection of my sincere gratitude.

On behalf of the 7th Congressional District, the State of Alabama and this nation, I ask my colleagues to join me in celebrating the tremendous accomplishments and extraordinary contributions of Sheyann Webb Christburg—an American icon of the Voting Rights Movement. We pay tribute to her bravery as a trailblazer and honor her continued efforts to motivate and uplift up children across the State of Alabama and this nation.