

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

AMANDA SAPIR'S VISION FOR
AMERICA

HON. GERRY E. STUDDS

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, March 10, 1995

Mr. STUDDS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor an outstanding young woman from my congressional district, Amanda Sapir of Kingston, MA. This week she won the national Voice of Democracy Award from the Veterans of Foreign Wars for an essay she wrote and recorded on her vision for America.

Amanda, an 18-year-old senior at Silver Lake Regional High School, is the first Massachusetts student to win the award in the 48-year history of the Voice of Democracy Program. She prevailed over 125,000 other students from across the country to win the \$20,000 T.C. Selman Memorial Scholarship Award, sponsored by the VFW and its ladies auxiliary. I was informed of the award by proud local veterans who visited with me this week.

But more important than Amanda's winning a contest, or even the scholarship, is the vision she conveyed: that diversity is America's greatest strength and that our Nation's long journey toward justice and equality for all citizens is not complete.

Amanda's words are so eloquent, her message so timely, that I wanted to include them in the RECORD as a reminder of how far we've come and how far we have to go.

MY VISION FOR AMERICA

(By Amanda Sapir)

The air was thick and sweet smelling. Traffic was bumper-to-bumper as usual. It seemed like there were people everywhere; people walking up and down the sidewalks, shoppers peering hopefully into store windows, tourists searching aimlessly for the nearest landmark, and the homeless sitting in the warmth of a typical hustle and bustle summer in Washington, D.C. It was just another day when I was among the eternally lost sightseers and Helen among the homeless.

"Where's Wisconsin Ave.?" I asked a gentleman who responded, "Isn't that near O street?" "Hmm, where's O Street?" "Beats me. Do you know where Pennsylvania Ave. is?" By the end of the conversation we were both, if you can believe it, even more confused than when we started. This is when I spotted another homeless looking woman sitting on the sidewalk clasping her most precious belongings. On one of her bags was a sticker that read, "Helen." I figured she would know her way around this maze they call Washington.

"Excuse me, ma'am, do you know where Wisconsin Avenue is?" She was looking straight ahead with an empty gaze, not acknowledging me for quite a few seconds. After waiting patiently, I was startled when she jerked her head towards me and staring with intensely fierce brown eyes asked, "What do you see?" as she pointed to a perfectly maintained photograph. Surprised, yet curious by her question, I answered, "Well,

there's an average looking older Asian woman, a middle-aged rather dirty looking white man, and a young well-dressed black woman all standing side by side." Apparently displeased by my answer, she yelled, "No, no, no!" Wondering where I went wrong, I asked, "Why what do you see?" She looked at me with those eyes and without hesitation said, "Three people. Keep walking up this street and you'll find Wisconsin Avenue."

I was stunned by her response, but learned that in Helen's answer was a translucently clear message that now typifies my vision for America, a nation where its citizens continue to make great strides toward demolishing discrimination by understanding that it is our differences which makes us similar. Although we may wear different clothes, earn different amounts of money, walk or talk differently, we are all just people with fears and hopes, struggles and joys. I feel that with this ideal in mind we as a nation can knock on the door to the next century with confidence, knowing that we will handle all changes and all challenges that will arise. However, this confidence is only achievable if all Americans feel included and worthy, without fearing discrimination.

As I continued on my walk, I learned how this could actually happen. Looking at museums, the White House, the Supreme Court and the Mall, I saw why the United States is the only global Superpower remaining. We rely on creative solutions, which are the result of educating and acting. My vision for a unified America necessitates effort. In order for compassion to prevail over discrimination, the nation must first call on our educators to teach about different places and different cultures. We need our nation's youth to further understand that we are all different, but that diversity is our greatest strength not only in problem solving but in fighting ignorance. Knowledge has a funny way of operating minds, and in the future, bright open minds will be quintessential in fighting prejudice. This knowledge is only useful if put into practice. My vision relies on Americans to act with the same moral impetus it took for civil rights to speak up and for American soldiers to leave their families to fight for our nation, we must also speak up and fight for equal treatment for everyone. As a country, we have already made leaping bounds in the name of equality, but there is more struggling to do, whether we are employees helping a co-worker cope with discrimination or an employer concentrating on having qualified diverse employees. We must act until minorities, disabled and abled are all viewed as people.

America is only as strong as its weakest link, and those links are tested by the way in which we treat people, be they friends or strangers. As this country enters a new millenia, progress will present many opportunities as well as obstacles. My vision is that on December 31, when the clock ticks the past century away, Americans, no matter what ethnicity or sociopolitical or economic status, together will unlock this potential of the 21st century with optimism and a renewed sincere commitment to educating and acting against discrimination and for open-mindedness and unity, so that when any American is asked, "What do you see?" the answer will be without hesitation, "People."

NATIONAL SERVICE CORPORATION

HON. ROBERT E. ANDREWS

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, March 10, 1995

Mr. ANDREWS. Mr. Speaker, a controversy has arisen recently over a protest staged by ACORN, a membership and advocacy group for low- and moderate-income families. The Washington Times, in a March 7 editorial, asserted that AmeriCorps members—whose stipends are subsidized by the Federal Government—may have worked for ACORN and therefore participated in the protest. Unfortunately, the newspaper got its facts wrong.

No AmeriCorps members work for ACORN, and none took part in the protest. Rather, 42 AmeriCorps members are serving with ACORN Housing Corporation, an entirely different organization that helps working families find homes.

Eli Segal, the CEO of the National Service Corporation, clarified the facts in his March 7 letter to the Washington Times. I have submitted his letter to set the record straight. I would like to express my disappointment that members of the press and of this body would spread misinformation to discredit a program as innovative, productive, and important as AmeriCorps.

AMERICORPS NATIONAL SERVICE,
Washington, DC, March 7, 1995.

TOD LINDBERG,
Editor of the Editorial Page,
Washington Times.

DEAR MR. LINDBERG: In your editorial today (Federally funded Newt-bashing), you asked whether AmeriCorps Members participated in the disruption of Monday's NACO luncheon, which prevented Speaker Gingrich from addressing the gathering. There is a simple answer: Absolutely not.

AmeriCorps doesn't support advocacy. Our statute and Regulations clearly prohibit it. Advocacy aims to make change through politics, and is therefore inherently a process of winners and losers. National service brings about positive change by helping local communities solve common problems through collective effort—where everyone ends up benefiting.

This is much more than rhetoric. Advocacy organizations were furious when our Regulations came out, but we didn't budge. We have also made it clear to all of our grantees that this is a matter of principle, not technicality. We will cut off funding to programs that do not comply. I have reminded all of our programs of these matters, today, in writing. AmeriCorps aims to re-kit community. That can't happen when basic freedoms of speech are trampled. In the wake of yesterday's disruption, we immediately investigated. Here's what we learned: No AmeriCorps Members participated in the incident (written conformation attached). In fact, the protesting organization is an entirely separate organization from our grantee—legally, and in Board, budget, staff and mission.

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