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PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. DAVID VITTER

OF LOUISIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, October 25, 1999

Mr. VITTER. Mr. Speaker, on rollcall No. 522, I was late arriving on the House floor. Had I been present, I would have voted "no."

CAMERA AND BASKETBALL HOOPS HELP BRIDGE CULTURAL GAP BETWEEN WEST VIRGINIANS AND PALESTINIANS

HON. NICK J. RAHALL II

OF WEST VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, October 25, 1999

Mr. RAHALL. Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to submit for the RECORD an article which appeared in the Beckley, WV, Register-Herald, on October 17, 1999.

As you will note from reading this article, 10 men from Beckley and 2 from Huntington, WV, representing the Memorial Baptist Church and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes recently visited Gaza and the West Bank in the Middle East, where they used some very common skills to build friendships with Palestinians.

The Reverend Paul Blizzard, who lead the group on the mission to Gaza and the West Bank, said that his visit was to show their love for the Palestinian people and to extend a helping hand in any way they could. And they did so in a most astonishing but effective manner—with a camera and basketball hoops. Aided by Bernard Bostick, coach at the Beckley-Stratton Junior High School, and Mike White, area director of the fellowship of Christian athletes, the West Virginians worked with basketball camps to help the youths develop their sports emphasis.

While the language barrier was present—West Virginians don't speak Arabic as a rule, and few Palestinians speak English—they found hand signals often worked just as well as words—and learned all over again that kids are kids and people are people no matter where they are when it comes to sports.

The camera was wielded by Rod Carney who owns the Grace Book Store in Beckley, and John Brown, a computer specialist with the Mine Safety and Health Administration in Mount Hope, WV, who took pictures of the basketball games and of families. Mr. Carney noted that "family is very important in Palestine, and they don't have any way of getting pictures made of themselves. Many families have been separated and it means a lot to them to have family portraits made or to even have individual pictures of family members." The film will be developed in Huntington and the photos sent to the Baptist workers in the West Bank for distribution among the families.

Reverend Blizzard noted that "there is so much bad press and misleading information about Palestinians. We see all the rock-throwing and terrorism and are led to believe those acts characterize the people there. It just is

not true. The Palestinian people are the most hospitable, loving people you would ever want to meet."

One of the highlights of the trip was the personal meeting with President Yasir Arafat during the visit. There was a prayer, and an exchange of gifts, with President Arafat giving the group a Nativity set with the inscription Bethlehem 2000 as a gift from Gaza, and the West Virginia group gave the President a gift of the world-famous West Virginia Glass, a Bible and a West Virginia Lapel Pin from Governor Cecil Underwood. President Arafat told the group they would be welcome again anytime they desire to visit Palestine.

It was my pleasure to personally convey Rev. Blizzard's request to me to help arrange for a personal meeting with President Arafat. I was able to hand the request to President Arafat in person during his recent visit to Washington.

It is Christian efforts such as those carried out by Rev. Blizzard and his group from the Beckley and Huntington Baptist Church and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes that can help us put an end to the mindless stereotyping of Palestinians and others of Arab-descent as bomb-throwing terrorists. I know Rev. Blizzard will continue his missionary work in Palestine in the years to come.

As the Representative of Rev. Blizzard and the other 11 members of his group who made the trip, I am very proud to insert the newspaper article describing his experience in Palestine in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

TEN MEN FROM BECKLEY, TWO FROM HUNTINGTON, USED SKILLS TO BUILD FRIENDSHIPS WITH PALESTINIANS

(By Bev Davis)

A Beckley group used a basketball, a camera to build friendships in another part of the world.

The Rev. Paul Blizzard, pastor of Memorial Baptist Church in Beckley, used contacts from previous trips to the Middle East to arrange a 12-day visit to Gaza and the West Bank, where 10 men from Beckley and two from Huntington used some special skills to build friendships with Palestinians there.

"There is so much bad press and misleading information about Palestinians. We see all of the rock-throwing and terrorism and are led to believe those acts characterize the people there. It just is not true. The Palestinians we met are the most hospitable, loving people you would ever want to meet," Blizzard said.

The American team took gifts of food, shoes, sports equipment and T-shirts.

"We gave over 100 pairs of shoes to a doctor who will distribute them in a Bedouin camp in Gaza. The people are very poor there. The shoes will enable the doctor to get people to come to the clinic for vaccinations and other medical services," Blizzard said.

The group also organized a three-fold plan to provide several services to their Palestinian hosts.

Bernard Bostick, a coach at Beckley-Stratton Junior High School, and Mike White, area director of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, prepared themselves to work in basketball camps, teaching new skills and helping the Palestinians develop their sports emphasis.

"We met with a group of kids who didn't speak much English, and we didn't know Arabic, but when the balls started to bounce, there was one language," White said. "We used hand signals to explain techniques, and the expressions on the faces of the players told us immediately they were pleased with

new moves they learned from Bernie. Kids are kids, and people are people, no matter where they are. We had a wonderful opportunity to get to know these groups, and it was hard to leave."

A Baptist group arranged for Rod Carney, owner of Grace Book Store in Beckley and John Brown, a computer specialist with the Mine Safety and Health Administration in Mount Hope, to take pictures of people living in the West Bank.

"Family is very important there, and they don't have any way of getting pictures made. A lot of families have been separated, and it means a lot to them to have family portraits made or to even have individual pictures of family members," Carney said.

He shot 16 rolls of film and sent them to Huntington, where a photo shop will develop the photographs at no charge and send them back for Baptist workers in the West Bank to distribute to the families there.

"We were in homes of people who had very little, and yet they always welcomed us warmly and offered us food and beverages. We knew sometimes they were offering us all they had. We were all deeply touched by their hospitality," Carney said.

"When people asked us why we came, we told them we believe God wanted us to go there to show our love for the Palestinian people and to extend a hand to help them in any way we could," Brown said.

Huntington Audiologist Tom Waybright accompanied the group and did volunteer work in a school for the hearing-impaired.

"This was a unique opportunity to learn more about the people and to provide a service for them," Blizzard said. "Everywhere we went, people were so appreciative and they just treated us like family."

One unexpected highlight was the opportunity to meet with Palestinian National Authority President Yasser Arafat and exchange greetings and gifts with him, Blizzard added.

"Through the efforts of Abu Tariq, the president's personal representative, our whole group was invited into the national headquarters to meet him. We talked with him and prayed with him. We gave him gifts from Gov. Cecil Underwood's office—lapel pins in the shape of the state of West Virginia and a piece of glass from our state. The president gave us a Nativity set with the inscription 'Bethlehem 2000'. One of our men gave him a Bible. It was quite an experience for all of us," Blizzard said.

"It was reported the next day that Arafat enjoyed our visit very much and he sent word that we are welcome again," Blizzard said.

Several of the men said they would like to go back.

"We have made wonderful friends in the Middle East and are eager to see them again. We have come to love the Palestinian people, and we look forward to our return there," Blizzard said.

TRIBUTE TO ARTURO RODRIGUEZ

HON. HOWARD L. BERMAN

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, October 25, 1999

Mr. BERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to my close friend, Arturo Rodriguez, who has been the president of the United Farm Workers since 1993. Arturo assumed the presidency of the UFW following the death of the organization's founder, Cesar Chavez. Although no one could ever replace Cesar