

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PENCE). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. PALLONE addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES CAN SERVE IN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OR ANY FIELD OF ENDEAVOR WITH JUST MINOR CHANGES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Rhode Island (Mr. LANGEVIN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Mr. Speaker, just a few weeks ago, I was up here speaking as the proud sponsor of a resolution honoring Erik Weihenmayer, a young man who inspires not only people with disabilities but all of us struggling to overcome our own obstacles and challenges. As the first blind person to summit Mount Everest, he illustrates the immense power of the human spirit. However, while it is important to pay homage to such remarkable people, I believe it is equally important that we honor those who make such special achievements possible.

Tonight I would like to pay tribute to the gentleman from Illinois (Speaker HASTERT); the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. GEPHARDT), the minority leader; the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. NEY); and the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER), the ranking member of the Committee on House Administration; the gentleman from Rhode Island (Mr. KENNEDY); the Committee on Armed Services and the Committee on Small Business and all their dedicated staff, as well as those who manage the floor activity on a daily basis. They have all provided tremendous support to me as a freshman Member of the United States Congress.

My experience illustrates the compassionate understanding one can receive from his colleagues and employers once they are aware of his or her needs. I have been overwhelmed by just how considerate and flexible my colleagues have been in ensuring that I can work effectively in Congress.

When I dreamed of running for this office, I was not sure how accessible the congressional buildings would be, but from the moment I was elected in November of last year, the hard-working engineers, architects, design managers, and my fellow Members of Congress made it clear that they would do whatever was necessary to make my office, the committees on which I serve, and the House floor accessible. One of the products of this generous response to my needs, in fact, is the lectern and microphone that I am using right now. It took months to design and build this remarkable podium which can be easily raised and lowered and is truly a work of art.

I gratefully recognize all the time and resources that were dedicated to

making this lectern, to installing additional voting machines on the floor, and placing ramps in my committee rooms and providing accessible office space. What everyone involved in this process may not realize, however, is that beyond enabling me to better serve my constituents, they have also opened the doors for people with disabilities to serve in this Chamber in the future.

As I have said many times before, I may be the first quadriplegic elected to the United States Congress but most certainly I will not be the last. The invaluable message that has been delivered in making this Chamber accessible is that any one of the nearly 53 million people with disabilities in this country can become a Member of the United States Congress or can serve in any other field of endeavor with just minor changes.

Mr. Speaker, people with disabilities are an integral but underutilized part of our workforce. With minor accommodations they can become an even more important part of our society and be involved in strengthening America's communities, businesses, and government. That is why I am so thankful to President Bush, who has highlighted the need to make workplaces, housing, education, technology, and our society in general, more accessible to all Americans. The President's new Freedom Initiative is an important proposal which calls for funding of a broad range of programs that together can help create countless new opportunities for many Americans who continually face unnecessary obstacles because of their disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, I am eager to work with President Bush to make this new Freedom Initiative a reality. To this end, I recently sent a letter co-signed by 23 of my colleagues to the House appropriators seeking their support in providing funds for the President's proposals. This is an issue on which we can all come together regardless of party background and help open doors for millions of people who are eager to conquer new challenges.

Mr. Speaker, once again, I extend my heartfelt thanks to the dozens of people who have made my tenure in Congress possible. Ensuring that some day every workplace in America will be able to respond to the special needs of employees in the same way is one of my top priorities in Congress. When that happens, we will all benefit from the remarkable talents and contributions of the millions of Americans with disabilities who are eager to pursue their dreams just as I have.

TRIBUTE TO BIRDIE KYLE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. RAHALL) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. RAHALL. Mr. Speaker, in the rush to greatness upon which many of us embark in this city, in the heat of

the TV camera lights, in the chaos of clashing interests, it is important that we pause and take stock of those who brought us here, keep us here, and help make us. So this evening I thank and I pay respect to my long-time legislative director Birdie Kyle who passed away over our recent work period.

Birdie once wrote, "I am a native West Virginian born in Fayette County at MacDunn but raised up on Cabin Creek in the coalfields. I was born in a one-room abandoned boxcar. When I was little, my older sister tormented me when she felt like it by calling me 'Old Boxcar Bill.' I do not remember which made me the madder, being reminded that I was born in a boxcar or being called Bill when I was a girl. Probably both."

That was Birdie Kyle writing for West Virginia's Goldenseal Magazine in 1980.

Well, Boxcar Bill traveled far from her humble beginnings, but she never lost sight of the hills of home or the people there.

Birdie Kyle, a true coal miner's daughter, a native West Virginian in every sense, served West Virginia and our Nation in the Congress for more than 3 decades. Birdie served with me since 1989, and I appreciate deeply her loyalty and dedication. Before that, she spent most of her career with the late Senator Jennings Randolph.

Her mainstay of work for the Senator and for me was education. For Birdie, education was not a part of one's life. It was life itself. Teachers captivated her. Students compelled her.

Books were with her always, from her earliest moments to her latest nights. If books were her backbone, words were her blood. She was the mother of wordsmiths and, boy, could she make me sound good.

Birdie's letters, more often than not, prompted replies, and I got more kudos from her letters than anything.

Her list of legislative responsibilities in my office over the years reads like a record of the republic itself: Education to health care, the Postal Service to the Middle East. As one person who called to express their sympathy said, "She knew everything and everybody."

How true. She could converse on every subject, but that was not her most unique attribute. She did not care if one was king or commoner. She was going to sway you to her belief before you left the building, and most of the time she did.

Will there ever be another Birdie Kyle? No. Can one person fill her shoes? No.

Birdie was, in addition, the poet laureate of the office. Each Christmas and on my birthday she composed wonderful verses that not only made me feel special but it was so wonderful I started believing it.

She gave me my voice on many issues, issues of life and death, on wealth and poverty, on education and ignorance, health care and child care.

Her deep compassion infected us all. In a city where a lot of people can