

national anthem. I thought of another night sky some 150 years ago by the light of rockets of a different sort when Francis Scott Key penned those magnificent lines about the United States of America.

The rocket cleared the tower. Moments after, a burst of light appeared before the gantry way. The moment the main orbiter engines reached the top of the tower, Mr. Speaker, the humid Florida night sky turned as bright as day. The same instant, the sound with all its earthshaking force struck our location like a hurricane. The Earth shook and an explosion of hot air rushed past. I felt as if the wind had been knocked out of me, the sound only becoming louder as the rocket climbed in the early morning sky.

Mr. Speaker, it was as though the Earth gave birth to a piece of sun and was sending it home. *Atlantis* seemed almost lazy in its rate of ascent. As the ship climbed, the light from the rocket which had, at first, shone dimly like the dawn, turned to midday brightness, revealing a blue sky and leaving shadows on the landscape.

I turned to look at my wife. Karen stood with wet eyes in that other worldly brilliance. I was nearly overcome with emotion. But there was still serious work to be done.

The shuttle climbed, leaving in its wake a sycamore-like column of smoke that seemed a pillar holding heaven itself. When the vehicle jettisoned its temporary booster rockets the crowd broke out into applause, but NASA Administrator Daniel Goldin would have none of it. His demeanor remained silent and stern. He explained that he did not celebrate launches until 8 minutes and 30 seconds into the launch. At that time the main engine cutoff occurred and the astronauts safely reached orbit.

As the light faded and the sky returned to the darkness of night, *Atlantis* appeared as a red dot disappearing into the Northeast sky. Still visible 160 miles away, we heard the words "main engine cutoff" on the public address system. The entire crowd broke into applause, relief and tears.

Later that morning I had the honor of speaking to over 100 mission specialists in the Firing Room. I would have called it mission control, but I learned that title belongs in Houston.

I made a few comments to those Purdue graduates on hand and then told all the heroes wearing headsets how the words of the national anthem that morning had struck me. I thanked them for their professionalism, for another safe launch, and for the inspiration which their teamwork and their spirit of exploration continues to provide to all Americans.

After sharing a meal of beans and cornbread with the crew, which is a traditional post-launch fare at NASA, we boarded a plane to Washington. As I drifted off to sleep, Mr. Speaker, the words of our national anthem rang in my ears, and I became more convinced

than ever that the rockets' red glare still gives proof in the air that this is the land of the free and the home of the brave.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. FLAKE). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BROWN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

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

DIVERSE COMMUNITY GROUPS OPPOSE H.R. 7, COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS ACT OF 2001

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

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Speaker, today the House was scheduled to vote on H.R. 7, the so-called Charitable Choice Act. However, the House Republican leadership had to delay the vote because of objections from both Republicans and Democrats alike that this bill would allow discrimination in job hiring based on a person's religious faith when using Federal funds.

Mr. Speaker, the truth is that we all support the good work of thousands of faith-based charities across this country. But the truth is also that, as more Members of Congress and more American citizens learn about what is actually in H.R. 7, the support for this bill is faltering badly.

Over 1,000 religious leaders, pastors, priests and rabbis have signed a petition urging this Congress tomorrow to oppose the President's faith-based charity bill.

Why? Because it would harm religion, not help religion.

Why? Because it would not only allow discrimination in job hiring using Federal dollars, it would actually subsidize such discrimination.

Mr. Speaker, let me mention some of the diverse religious and education and civic groups and civil rights groups that stand firmly opposed to the passage of H.R. 7: The American Association of School Administrators; the American Association of University Women; the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees; the American Federation of Teachers; the American Jewish Committee. The Anti-Defamation League opposes this bill, along with the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, the National Education Association, and the National PTA.

Mr. Speaker, the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. opposes this bill, along with the Episcopal Church U.S.A., the Interfaith Alliance and the United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society, along with many other religious and civic groups strongly oppose the passage of this bill on the floor of the House tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, let me talk about what is wrong with this bill. Let me empha-

size three points: First, the bill is unnecessary. It is unnecessary. Under long-standing law in this country, the Federal Government has been able to support faith-based groups under several conditions and several proper conditions. First, that they not be directly churches or houses of worship. That if churches want to do faith-based work with Federal dollars, they should set up a separate 501(c)(3) secular organization. Then those groups cannot proselytize with tax dollars, and they cannot discriminate in job hiring with those tax dollars.

Under those limited but important conditions, for decades faith-based groups such as Catholic Charities and Lutheran Social Services have received Federal dollars to help social work causes without obliterating the wall of separation between church and State. So the bill is simply a solution in search of a problem.

Secondly, as I mentioned, this bill not only allows discrimination against American citizens based on their religion, it subsidizes it. Let me be specific. If this bill were to become law and a church associated with Bob Jones University were to receive a Federal grant under the program, that church could use our tax dollars to put out a sign that says no Catholic need apply here for a federally funded job. Mr. Speaker, that is wrong.

In the year 2001, over 200 years after the passage of the Bill of Rights, no American citizen should have to pass someone else's religious test to qualify for a federally funded job. No American citizen, not one, should be fired from a federally funded job simply and solely because of that person's religious faith.

Next, I would point out that this bill basically is built on a foundation of a false premise, the false premise that somehow if the Federal tax dollars of this government are not going directly to our houses of worship and our synagogues and mosques, that is somehow discrimination against religion. I think Mr. Madison and Mr. Jefferson would be shocked by that suggestion of discrimination against religion. I think they would have argued that the Bill of Rights for 200 years has not discriminated against religion. The Bill of Rights has put religion on a pedestal above the long arm and reach of the Federal Government, both Federal funding and the Federal regulations that follow.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 7 is a bad bill for our churches, our religion, our faith and our country. I urge a "no" vote tomorrow.

PASS PATIENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS FOR MEANINGFUL HMO REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. FLAKE). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2001, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, this evening I want to spend the time with