

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

RECOGNIZING AND HONORING SOLDIERS FIGHTING THE WAR WHO ARE NOT AMERICAN CITIZENS

HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 4, 2007

Mr. RANGEL. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize soldiers who are fighting and dying in the war, but are not American Citizens and to enter into the record an article from the September 18, 2007, edition of the New York Times entitled, "Becoming an American Citizen, the Hardest Way" by Clyde Haberman.

Everyday there are men and women who are not yet American citizens fighting on the battle fields in Iraq and Afghanistan. Words alone are not enough to express my gratitude and sincere thanks to American and soon-to-be American soldiers, who made the ultimate sacrifice by putting their lives on the line everyday. Volunteering to serve in the armed forces is a brave and noble act and there are so many soldiers who do so in part due to the opportunity presented by the accelerated naturalization process available to those who enter military service. To date, there have been 103 posthumous grants of American citizenship to non-citizen war soldiers.

The sacrifice made by non-citizens who have and are currently enlisting in the armed services demonstrates the value of American citizenship. Their sacrifice and commitment is honorable and should never be forgotten. Our great country, despite some of the challenges we face, continues to be the place in the entire world where people from all over the world are inspired by democracy, justice, freedom of religion, peace, and an opportunity to pursue happiness. This explains the motivation for non-citizens to enlist in the military and put their lives on the line in hopes of achieving their American dream.

I'm grateful that I had an opportunity to assist with the granting of American citizenship to Corporal Alcántara of the United States Army, one of my constituents, who lost his life in Iraq. I grieve at the loss of the life of a young man with such a great promise and I again extend my heartfelt sympathy to his family and many friends in our community.

[From the New York Times, Sept. 18, 2007]

BECOMING AN AMERICAN CITIZEN, THE HARDEST WAY

(By Clyde Haberman)

On an August day when some Iraqi's home-made bomb tore through him, Cpl. Juan Mariel Alcántara became an American. He never got to appreciate the honor.

A little-discussed detail of this war is that some of those fighting in it as soldiers of the United States are not American citizens. Over all, about 21,000 noncitizens are serving in this country's armed forces, the Defense Department says.

Until death claimed him on Aug. 6, one of them was Corporal Alcántara of the United States Army.

He did not live long enough to acquire a richly textured biography. He was born in the Dominican Republic, reared in Washington Heights. He was 22 when the bomb—an improvised explosive device, in military-speak—ended his life and the lives of three fellow soldiers from the Second Infantry Division while they searched a house in Baquba, north of Baghdad.

At 22, Corporal Alcántara was old enough to have talked about going to college and maybe becoming a New York police officer, old enough to have a fiancée, old enough to have fathered a baby girl he never saw, Jaylani, 6 weeks old when he was killed. He was old enough, too, to have sought American citizenship.

Every year, thousands of noncitizen soldiers do that, through an accelerated naturalization process offered to those who put themselves in harm's way so that the rest of us can go about our lives untouched by war. And every year, some of those soldiers become citizens only after they have literally been wrapped in the flag.

No other war has produced anywhere near as many posthumous citizens as this one, according to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. Corporal Alcántara is the latest, No. 103. He is the 12th from New York, an honor roll that reflects today's city: 10 men and 2 women born in the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Guyana, Belize, Trinidad and Tobago, Myanmar and Nigeria.

The Americanization of Juan Alcántara came at his family's request. Representative Charles B. Rangel of Manhattan helped shepherd the application through the bureaucracy in a matter of days. Officially, the corporal was declared an American from the day he died.

There was a formal ceremony yesterday in the colonnaded Great Hall of City College of New York. Corporal Alcántara's relatives accepted his certificate of posthumous citizenship. They sat somberly in a front row: his mother, his two sisters and his fiancée, Sayonara Lopez, who fed Jaylani from a bottle.

Like scores of others filling the rows behind them, they carried small American flags. Yesterday was Citizenship Day across the country, a celebratory day for newly minted Americans. In the vaulted majesty of the Great Hall, used on occasion for such ceremonies, 242 people from 51 countries took the oath of citizenship. They were men and women like Lance Whitely, 32, formerly of Jamaica, now of the Bronx. "It's everybody's dream to become an American citizen," he said before the ceremony began.

The new citizens listened to speeches on America's grandeur and watched a large-screen video of President Bush offering congratulations.

Mr. Rangel, a critic of the Iraq war, left politics at the door. He spoke of a country that is hardly perfect but is ever working to make itself better. Once a combat soldier himself, part of the same Second Infantry Division during the Korean War, he talked about Corporal Alcántara's sacrifice and America's debt to him.

Throughout, the Alcántara family sat disconsolately. They applauded with the others and recited the Pledge of Allegiance and waved their little flags. But their hearts were elsewhere.

Maria Alcántara, the soldier's mother, is clearly a woman of stricken soul. She holds

Mr. Bush responsible for her son's death. Corporal Alcántara's Iraq duty was supposed to have ended on June 28, a day before his daughter was born. But his tour was extended as part of the president's troop "surge."

"If my son had been allowed to return, he would be alive," Ms. Alcántara said in Spanish, "and he"—meaning the president—"is guilty."

"My happiness, my everything, is gone," she said.

The mother, who is not an American citizen, also spoke of being grateful for her son's naturalization. Still, gratitude does not bring peace of mind, said one of her daughters, Fredelinda Peña. "It's not a happy moment," Ms. Peña said.

Unlike others on this day of celebration, the family wiped away tears. When the president's image appeared on the screen, Ms. Alcántara kept her head down. She could not bring herself to look at the man who she felt was the reason her son did not come home.

TRIBUTE TO BRANDIS GRIFFITH

HON. BART GORDON

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 4, 2007

Mr. GORDON of Tennessee. Madam Speaker, I rise today to express my appreciation to a very dedicated and hard working employee of the House Committee on Science and Technology. Her tenure on the Committee may have been brief, but Brandis Griffith deserves a big "thank you" for all of her hard work.

Brandis served as Deputy Communications Director for the Committee since Democrats assumed the Majority in Congress this January. She ably handled the Committee's website—both content and continued development—and assisted our press office with Member outreach and a wide range of other needs.

Working with our Committee was Brandis' first job on Capitol Hill, but her poise and flexibility in the position proved she was a fast learner and an eager participant in any task set before her.

She came to the Committee directly from a job with the University of Kansas. There, she spent six months developing her science writing skills as a research writer and media relations specialist in KU's Office of University Relations.

Prior to that, Brandis worked in broadcast journalism as a local television reporter. In her nearly five years as a reporter, Brandis worked for both KARK-TV in Little Rock, Arkansas and KFDX-TV in Wichita Falls, Texas.

Given our enthusiasm for Brandis' work while with the Committee, it may seem a bit strange that her stay was so brief. However, Brandis was offered an opportunity she simply

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