

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

RECOGNIZING ALEXANDER KEITH HANSEN FOR ACHIEVING THE RANK OF EAGLE SCOUT

HON. SAM GRAVES

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 13, 2007

Mr. GRAVES. Madam Speaker, I proudly pause to recognize Alexander K. Hansen, a very special young man who has exemplified the finest qualities of citizenship and leadership by taking an active part in the Boy Scouts of America and in earning the most prestigious award of Eagle Scout.

Alexander has been very active with his troop, participating in many Scout activities. Over the many years Alexander has been involved with scouting, he has not only earned numerous merit badges, but also the respect of his family, peers, and community.

Madam Speaker, I proudly ask you to join me in commending Alexander K. Hansen for his accomplishments with the Boy Scouts of America and for his efforts put forth in achieving the highest distinction of Eagle Scout.

HONORING THE ANTI-WAR ACTIVISM AND SOCIAL CONSCIENCE OF THE LATE NORMA BECKER

HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 13, 2007

Mr. RANGEL. Madam Speaker, I rise today in memory of anti-war powerhouse Norma Becker, whose energy, spirit, and integrity fueled the opposition to the Vietnam War. A New York City memorial service held in her honor on November 3 drew hundreds, underscoring how her passion for peace won over the hearts and minds of many. She, herself, exemplified equal measures of heart and mind—impressing others with the sharpness of her intellect and her thoroughly analytical and logical approach to problems, but impelling them to act through her vision, her sensitivity, her soul.

She was a public school teacher with a voracious appetite for learning and social indignation. For 10 years, she presided over the Fifth Avenue Vietnam Peace Parade Committee, the most prominent metropolitan antiwar coalition in the country. She was a founding member of Mobilization for Survival and served as chair of the War Resisters League for 6 years. She lent her voice and talents, not only to the cause for peace, but to the Civil Rights Movement, as well.

She has engraved her legacy into the American consciousness, and the country is the better for it. I submit for the RECORD and the interest of my colleagues some of the tributes paid to Norma Becker during her memorial service.

TRIBUTES TO NORMA BECKER
NORMA BECKER: A TRIBUTE AND CELEBRATION
(By Sidney Peck)

It was in December 1966, that I first met Norma Becker. I had come to New York City to attend the executive committee meeting of the newly organized Spring Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam. During a break in the meeting, A.J. Muste invited me to join him with a few others the next day to exchange views about a number of political issues.

Being in New York City was new for me, having lived most of my life in St. Paul, Minnesota. I braved the big city subway system and then found 68 Charles Street. I was looking for the name Norma Becker on a doorbell—but no name was listed. So I rang both bells and soon a buzzer sounded.

I heard a loud yell—a question, “WHO’S THERE?!!!!” I was too intimidated to respond. Again the loud question—“WHO’S THERE?,” followed by “THE DOOR’S OPEN. COME ON UP.” I opened the door and went up. She was standing at the top of the stairway—she had a big grin on her face, looked straight into my eyes and said, “Hi, I’m Norma,” and with the same breath—both question and command—asked, “What’s your name?” “Sidney,” I answered rather softly. “SIDNEY,” she exclaimed, and with the same breath asked, “Where are you from?” “The Midwest,” I answered aloud, “And your name is SIDNEY?” “Most people call me Sid,” I replied. “That’s very interesting, how come?” she asked, and added, “Come on in and hang your jacket up in the closet. Have you had lunch yet? Sit down and tell me about yourself, before the others come.”

That is how our friendship began. She told me how she was a teacher at a public school, how she loved to teach but despised the system. She told me about her marriage and divorce—about her children, Gene and Diane. She talked about her involvement with the civil rights movement and the peace movement—and more recently the anti-Vietnam war movement, of her work with the Teacher’s Committee and The Fifth Avenue Vietnam Peace Parade Committee. A total stranger only moments before, she made me feel right at home.

Soon the others arrived and we shared our views about this issue and that question and were encouraged to appreciate and respect the profound differences that occasionally rose to the surface. Norma’s place was a safe house to the Movement. It gave us a sense of community.

Just as we were about to adjourn, Diane appeared, soon followed by Gene who gave everyone a big “Hello, what’s happenin’?” greeting. I liked them immediately because of their great sense of humor. They had never met anyone from the Midwest. “Minnesota?” asked Gene, “Where in the hell is Minnesota?” So, Norma invited me to stay for supper and answer that question. It was over a meal of whatever was left in the refrigerator that we began a family friendship.

Over many years, I learned to understand Norma’s language. Most of all, I learned to understand what Norma was saying when she wasn’t talking at all: when she just looked—or smiled—or laughed—or cried—or grimaced—or shrugged.

Norma was a very careful listener. I think that was because she was such a good teach-

er. Her penwomanhood alone was impressive! And, she was always the teacher and student wrapped in one. Probing, questioning: “How come?”; “Why do you say that?”; “What are your reasons?”; “What is your evidence?” and on. She needed to have the facts straight and the facts had to make sense. She has a lot of left brain: very analytical, logical, organized. But even more powerful was her right brain: her vision and sensitivity. Above all, Norma was heart and soul.

How else can you account for her record of leadership in our movement for peace and social justice? For ten years, she presided over the most prominent metropolitan antiwar coalition in the country—The Fifth Avenue Vietnam Peace Parade Committee. The political waters of New York City are treacherous, especially those of the left and progressive movement. No other city has more political splinters, splits, factions, fragments, division and sects—all of whom believe they are the vanguard. Each of which proclaims the correct political line. And none of whom shall ever be denied a representative speaker at the coalition demonstration—or else!

“What do you mean, ‘or else?’” asked Norma, “Or else what?” And then she said nothing—just looked, rubbed her chin and waited as the demand was withdrawn—and then she smiled. “Thank you very much for helping to reach an agreement on our plans for the demonstration.” She was a superb communicator, even to those who resisted her leadership. She was tireless in her efforts to build a true coalition. She was an outstanding leader of the anti-Vietnam war movement.

On April 15, 1967, over 400,000 people marched from Central Park and Harlem and assembled on First Avenue in front of the United Nations to protest U.S. military intervention in Vietnam and demand an end to the war. The success of that powerful demonstration was due in large measure of the work of The Fifth Avenue Vietnam Peace Parade Committee, under Norma’s skillful leadership.

Fifteen years later, Norma threw herself into organizing New York City peace sentiment in support of the mass demonstration in Central Park on June 12, 1982. It was Norma’s tireless and devoted leadership of the New York City peace movement that contributed immensely to the outpouring of over a million people in the largest single demonstration for peace in the history of the country.

In both of these historic demonstrations, Norma carried a considerable burden over the most difficult political obstacles. On both occasions, it was her energy, spirit and integrity that helped to sustain the unity of mass action. For more than 20 years, Norma was in the vigils, the sit-ins, the days of protest, the trains to Washington, the Hiroshima actions. She did the calling and the fundraising and the letter writing. She went to this meeting and that conference and hosted thousands of gatherings at Norma’s place.

In the spring of 1977, she was a founding organizer of the Mobilization for Survival and for several years organized for peace and social justice at the national level. During this

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