

(Ms. KAPTUR addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

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

THE FREEDOM TO . . .

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

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, there are more than a dozen countries in this world that restrict freedom of religion, including Iran and China. Imagine being told your religion was unacceptable and being carted off to jail for offering a Bible to someone. This is not an unusual occurrence in some countries with state-sponsored religions.

In this country, we have a few sacrosanct words known as "First Amendment to the Constitution" that guarantee no one will be punished for the religion that they choose to follow: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press, or of the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

When a person decides to burn the Koran, the Bible, or any other sacred document in this country, he has the freedom to do so even if the overwhelming majority of us vehemently disagree with his decision. It is difficult for the citizens of some other countries to understand or to tolerate this kind of freedom. Yet it is the bedrock of our democracy.

We have the right to disagree, to ignore, to protest against or to take the matter to court for a ruling, but we do not have the right to determine what another person is to believe. Unfortunately, that kind of freedom challenges other governments and cultures.

The freedoms we hold dear seem uncontrollable to those who would dictate what people wear, worship, and support. For example, some governments think that if their citizens are educated the next thing that will happen is that they will begin to think and ask questions, and that can't be tolerated by those in power. Or they believe that only one religion is true and, therefore, no others can be taught or people might stray from the religion and the religion might falter. In the United States, we have no such fear because our Constitution gives us the confidence and the courage to tolerate diversity.

September 17 is Constitution Day and a time that we should all take to be

grateful for the strength and breadth of our system of government. We should reflect on our freedoms and know that they are protected.

That date was chosen because on September 17, 1787, the Constitutional Convention met for the last time in Philadelphia to sign the document before it was sent to the 13 States to be ratified. The Founding Fathers drew upon the wisdom of the ages to give us a gift that has endured for more than two centuries, the United States Constitution.

The blueprint for our government is not a long document. You can keep a copy in your shirt pocket. I happen to have one here, Mr. Speaker. The basic document is under 5,000 words, but it covers the building blocks for our three equal branches of government: the executive, the legislative, and the judicial arms of government.

The first 10 amendments lay out the rights of every citizen. How many times have you heard the phrase, "I know my rights." Well, we know them because they have been delineated for us in the Bill of Rights.

Winston Churchill famously said in a speech in the House of Commons in 1947: "Many forms of government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."

Today I issue a challenge to the citizens to read their Constitution on September 17 each year. It will help your understanding of what and who you are in this country, and it will strengthen your values.

In a speech to the Senate in 1850, Henry Clay said: "The Constitution of the United States was made not merely for the generation that then existed, but for posterity, unlimited, undefined, endless, perpetual posterity."

He has been proven correct, Mr. Speaker, and let us all work to protect it and keep it that way.

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WE HOLD THESE TRUTHS

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

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Mr. Speaker, tomorrow we celebrate the 223rd anniversary of the signing of the United States Constitution. As we do so, I think it is important to consider the humbling legacy bestowed by those who founded this country and the lawmakers who actually did come before us; because each day those of us who are currently holding office, we are so mired in the challenges and complexities of modern public policy, we scurry through these stately, ornate halls, often without so much as a glimpse at

or a thought of the profound history that is depicted around us.

For instance, just steps away, within the interior of the majestic Capitol Dome, is the Rotunda. I spent some time there recently, Mr. Speaker, reflecting on the moments in our Nation's history that gave rise to the gift of liberty we strive to safeguard each day in this body. Inside the Rotunda is a series of paintings that offer rich glimpses into some of these moments, starting with the Landing of Columbus in 1492, the Discovery of the Mississippi by DeSoto in 1541, as well as the Baptism of Pocahontas in 1613. They all depict the opening of a new, mysterious world full of promise and things yet to come.

The painting, the Embarkation of the Pilgrims in 1620, also speaks of opportunity, the anticipation of realizing a dream of freedom. The Declaration of Independence in 1776 follows. The Surrender of General Burgoyne in 1777, and the Surrender of Lord Cornwallis in 1781, as well as George Washington Resigning His Commission in 1783 are all celebrated pieces depicting the first moments of that new Republic.

Possibly the most famous of these paintings is John Trumbull's 12-by-18-foot-large Declaration of Independence. This historical piece of art depicts the presentation of the Declaration to the Second Continental Congress. Standing at the forefront of this painting are Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Roger Sherman, Robert Livingston, and Benjamin Franklin, the authors of the profound document that gave way to the birth to our Nation.

Painstaking care was given to each word in the Declaration, none of which may be more memorable than these: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." You see, the Declaration built upon a theory of natural and universal rights, the consent of the governed, and a right of redress when government was in violation of those essential principles. After setting forth those standards, the Declaration continued with a litany of grievances against King George, which, Mr. Speaker, is a very interesting prospect to reread that part of the Declaration.

And then the Declaration finally concludes by saying, "We, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by the Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States . . . And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor."