

And he was also very wise.

He realized that one of the best ways to change the cruel and repressive Cuban regime was to work from within.

He used a provision in Cuba's constitution to seek peaceful political change and openness.

More specifically, he and his team created the Varela Project to gather more than 11,000 signatures of Cuban citizens on a petition that called for a more open political system.

Keep in mind that putting one's name on a petition to the Cuban Government is a courageous thing to do on that island. It puts that person and his or her family at great risk.

Nonetheless, in May 2002, he bravely presented the petition to the Cuban National Assembly for action exactly as allowed for in the Cuban Constitution.

What did the Cuban Government do in response to a heroic and reasonable call for change allowed for under the country's own laws?

It harassed Payá and his followers. It began its own referendum that made the island's socialist system "irrevocable," even after an additional 14,000 signatures were added to the Varela Project petition.

A year later many of Payá's allies were arrested in a crackdown that sent many dissidents, writers, and even librarians to prison.

Can you believe this craven response? The Cuban Government couldn't blame this Cuban-born effort on the United States, on other outside forces, on any of the usual suspects on which it blames all the island's woes.

Thousands of brave Cubans asking for political reform within the bounds of their own constitution were simply belittled, ignored, and harassed.

Payá was a modest man. I had hoped to meet him on my trip to the island earlier this year, but we were unable to visit—you see, the Cuban government doesn't want outsiders to visit people like Payá.

His peaceful and tireless efforts for peaceful change earned him the European Parliament's Sakarov Prize for Freedom of Thought in 2002, the National Democratic Institute's W. Averell Harriman Democracy Award in 2003, and a nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize from Václav Havel in 2005.

Payá's daughter Rosa Maria said amid her loss and tears last week that her father never gave up hope that the country could be changed from within and that "he just wanted for Cubans to have their rights . . . that's all he ever wanted."

Tragically the Cuban Government even arrested almost 50 Cubans who showed up to pay their respects at Payá's funeral.

Can you imagine—arresting people at a peaceful memorial service?

My colleagues, Senators BILL NELSON, MENENDEZ, and RUBIO, have introduced a Senate resolution recognizing his work and calling for the peaceful democratic changes in Cuba that Payá

spent his life pursuing. I am pleased to be a cosponsor of that resolution and was happy to see that it passed the Senate just yesterday.

Lastly, let me note that Payá was often concerned for his safety—sadly, given the Cuban Government's treatment of those wanting political freedom, not an unwarranted fear.

So I want to emphasize an important point in the Senate resolution on Mr. Payá. Specifically, I call on the Cuban Government to conduct a credible and transparent investigation into the auto accident that caused his death.

The Cuban Government owes this Cuban patriot and the Cuban people nothing less than a full accounting of his death. It also owes them the basic freedoms he tirelessly stood for.

Mr. President, I want to also take this opportunity to talk about another tragedy that continues day after day in Cuba—that of the detention of American citizen Alan Gross.

Alan was arrested more than 2½ years ago while trying to help the Cuban people have greater ability to communicate with one another.

When you go to Cuba, you realize the Castro regime not only blames the United States for all its woes but cynically makes it difficult for everyday Cubans to communicate or connect to the outside world using the Internet.

That is why thousands upon thousands of Cubans use a free Internet library every year at the U.S. Interests Section in Havana.

Alan Gross was arrested initially as a spy and eventually sentenced to 15 years in prison.

That is right—15 years.

Mr. Gross apologized for his actions and has asked for Cuban compassion to allow him to visit his 90-year old mother suffering from inoperable lung cancer in the United States. The United States recently let a former Cuban detainee who was out on supervised release in the United States visit his ailing brother in Cuba, but the Cuban Government has shown no such decency in return.

I met Alan in January in Cuba, and I am appreciative of the Cuban Government for allowing me that visit. He tried to remain in good spirits, but it wasn't easy. He has lost more than 100 pounds since his incarceration. He struggles to keep busy and healthy in jail, but it is not easy. Quite simply, he has been separated from his family for far too long.

Alan Gross is a kind, decent man. He is no spy. He is no threat to anyone. In fact, despite all that has happened, he noted to me how deeply he still cares for the Cuban people.

Let me say this as clear as I can: Alan Gross should no longer be a pawn of the Cuban Government in its disagreements with the United States.

The Cuban Government has made its point. It will get nothing but international shame from holding Alan any longer.

Let me also note that I do not support the failed U.S. embargo against

Cuba and think the best way to see change on the island is to flood it with American ideas and people.

But I will have to think long and hard before I do anything further to ease our relations while Alan remains so cruelly behind bars.

To Oswaldo Payá's family and brave colleagues and to Alan Gross, please know that you are not forgotten here in the Senate and around the world.

TRIBUTE TO REPRESENTATIVE PAUL FINDLEY

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, today I wish to honor former Congressman Paul Findley—a great American who served his country in war and in the hallowed halls of Congress, a son of Illinois, a prolific writer and Lincoln scholar, a former political adversary, and my now friend.

Paul Findley was born in Jacksonville, Illinois, on June 23, 1921. And at 91 years of age, today Paul is as active and involved as he has ever been. Paul earned a bachelor's degree from his beloved Illinois College in his hometown in 1943, where he was inducted into the prestigious Phi Beta Kappa society. After college, Paul served as a lieutenant in the Navy in the Pacific Theater from 1943 to 1946. His honorable service and that of the dwindling number of living Americans who served during World War II—one of the most difficult periods in our country's history is something we should all take time to reflect on and thank them for.

After the war, Paul became president of Pike Press, Inc., in Pittsfield. He spent several years as editor of this small town weekly newspaper. In 1952, Findley lost a bid for the Republican nomination for State senator—something he and I have in common, having lost our first campaigns for public office—but it didn't stop either of us.

In 1960 Paul Findley was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives representing the 20th Congressional District of Illinois. He served in the House honorably for more than 20 years, until in 1982 a young lawyer from Springfield and a long shot to win surprised a lot of people, including many of his supporters, by unseating the incumbent Findley. Though Paul Findley and I were opponents in that campaign, I always respected him and his public service. Notwithstanding what is often a bitter and rancorous climate of partisan politics, I am proud to call Paul Findley my friend.

One of Paul Findley's greatest accomplishments during his long and distinguished congressional career was his dogged, ultimately successful effort to preserve a great American treasure—the Springfield home of our beloved son of Illinois, Abraham Lincoln. Strolling today through this historic neighborhood at the heart of Springfield, as thousands of visitors do each year, it would be almost inconceivable that preserving Lincoln's home was ever a matter of debate. But it once

was. Back in the 1950s, the site visitors see today looked very different.

Where now-restored historic homes line a gravel street in a stately and peaceful neighborhood, then stood souvenir shops surrounded by a neighborhood that Paul Findley would later recall was, “rundown and decaying in all directions.” The Lincoln home itself—what Lincoln’s own private secretary once called “the precious heirloom of the republic”—was then the property of the State of Illinois.

For years, developers had tried to encroach on the historic site with the goal of exploiting the area for commercial opportunities. Some wanted a theme park. Others tried to build wax museums or hotels or buffet restaurants in close proximity. Still others had been trying unsuccessfully to ensure the home’s restoration and the preservation of the historical integrity of the surrounding area. In Congressman Paul Findley, those who wanted to honor this piece of history found their champion.

Findley traces his own interest in this project back to a presentation at a meeting of the Pittsfield Chamber of Commerce in 1955 well before he held elected office. At the meeting, a Springfield resident presented a case for preserving the Lincoln Home and developing the site commercially. While the plan for development never got off the ground, the presenter did make a point that Findley never forgot—that the Lincoln Home had largely been neglected compared to other Presidential homes. This, Findley regarded as “shameful, awful, scandalous.” It was in 1967, as the congressman representing the district that encompassed the Lincoln site that Findley became directly involved and took up the mantle of this effort. After years of lining up local, state, and national support, Congressman Findley announced in 1969 at a Springfield dinner that he would introduce legislation in Congress to make the site part of the National Park System. At that dinner was New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller, whom Findley had successfully enlisted in the effort.

The late Senators Charles Percy and Everett Dirksen introduced companion legislation in the Senate. The bills had the support of every member of the Illinois congressional delegation. But even with all this support, as those of us who have been around here long enough know, the fight wasn’t over. Money, as always, was an issue. People began trying to raise private funds. Congressman Findley worked tirelessly to get the attention of the relevant committee and subcommittee chairs—Democrats held the majorities in both Chambers at the time. Among other things, he invited key members to Springfield to tour the site after which they usually agreed to support his efforts.

I have no doubt that the commitments of these members to support his bill had as much to do with Findley’s

tenacity, passion, and determination as it did the power of seeing the Lincoln Home in person.

Then the Nixon administration threw its support behind Findley, and even asked that the bill be amended to fully authorize the appropriation required for the site—so the private fundraising was unnecessary. The House passed the bill first, and it enjoyed, as Findley says, “swift approval” in the Senate we can’t say that about too many matters around here anymore. On August 18, 1971, years of efforts culminated in a ceremony in the Old State Capitol in Springfield, just blocks away from the Lincoln Home. With Congressman Findley looking on, President Richard Nixon signed the Findley bill authorizing the establishment of the Lincoln Home National Historic Site.

Think about it, this was an effort championed by a Republican Congressman, passed by a Congress controlled by Democrats, and signed by a Republican President. It was a different time. One year after the signing ceremony, then-President of the Illinois State Senate, Paul Simon, signed legislation transferring the title for the Lincoln home to the National Park Service.

Thanks to the leadership of Congressman Paul Findley and the many local supporters of his efforts—including then-Springfield Mayor Nelson Howarth, the first superintendent of the Lincoln Home National Historic Site Albert Banton, the architect of the Lincoln Home Visitor Center and early supporter of preservation efforts Wally Henderson, and countless others—visitors to the site today can stroll the street Lincoln once strolled and take in the neighborhood in much the same way it would have looked to him more than 150 years ago.

The experience of visiting the Abraham Lincoln National Historic Site will undoubtedly inspire generations of young Americans to serve their country, just as Paul Findley has and as Abraham Lincoln did.

This is Paul Findley’s legacy.

It is a legacy that forever will be intertwined with President Lincoln—an honor that Paul richly deserves.

Throughout his 91 years on this Earth, my friend and this great American, Paul Findley, has made an indelible mark on our State of Illinois and our country—and he has not done yet.

CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, last week, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee reported out the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

How fitting that this treaty was considered and passed by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the 22nd anniversary of the enactment of Americans with Disabilities Act.

If anyone questions how important this treaty is to the millions of Americans living with disabilities, all they

needed to do was look around the room at the hearing earlier this month. The hearing room was filled to capacity—standing room only—with people urging the Senate to ratify this important document.

The United States has led the world in creating the legal framework, building the infrastructure, and designing facilities that ensure inclusion and opportunity for those living with disabilities. We celebrated the 22nd anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act—“ADA”—by reporting the treaty out of the Foreign Relations Committee on a strong bipartisan basis. I thank Sen. Kerry for holding that hearing and moving the treaty through the committee process.

As the majority leader has made clear, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities will soon be considered on the Senate floor. The Members of this body will have an opportunity to affirm our Nation’s leadership on disability issues by ratifying this important treaty. I hope that we will do so. And I hope we will ratify this treaty with the strong bipartisan support that has always characterized the Senate’s work on disability issues.

For the 54 million Americans living with a disability, laws like the ADA have provided an opportunity to learn, travel, work, and live independently. Perhaps no one knows that better than Ann Ford of Springfield, Illinois. Ann had polio as a child and for many years she commuted on crutches. This challenging and energy-consuming task required Ann to meticulously plan every trip. At the grocery store, Ann would purchase all she needed in 20 minutes, in order to be home before becoming exhausted.

After the ADA was enacted, the store manager invited Ann to use a recently purchased electric scooter. Ann remembers that day clearly, in part because she shopped for an hour and a half going up and down every aisle in the store.

Most of us don’t give a second thought to buying groceries. But for Ann and millions like her, our Nation’s commitment to removing physical barriers has expended their world. Now, we have an opportunity to demonstrate our commitment and advance disability rights around the world by ratifying this treaty.

The support for this treaty is broad and bipartisan. I thank my friend, Senator JOHN MCCAIN, for leading this effort with me. He is a great ally and without him we would not have made such great progress.

I also thank Senator BARRASSO, HARKIN, TOM UDALL, MORAN, and COONS for their bipartisan support and dedication to the ratification effort.

This treaty is supported by 165 disability organizations, including the United States International Council on Disabilities, the American Association of People with Disabilities, Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund, and the National Disability Rights Network, and 21 veterans groups, including