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HONORING JIM REES

HON. FRANK R. WOLF

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 18, 2014

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Jim Rees, who passed away on September 9, 2014, at his home in Markham, Virginia.

Jim served as president of George Washington's Mount Vernon estate for two decades, from 1994 to 2013. I had the privilege of working closely with Jim over the years on many important issues, especially working to improve historical literacy among young Americans. Jim was a tireless advocate of George Washington's legacy, his estate at Mount Vernon and the leadership virtues of our nation's indispensable founding father. Because of his work building Mount Vernon's endowment and revitalizing interest in the estate, Jim was called "an indispensable man to Mount Vernon in his time" by Barbara Lucas, regent of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, who spoke to the Washington Post about Rees' legacy.

Jim was beloved not only by the board of the Ladies' Association, staff and volunteers but also by all those who share his commitment to preserving the legacy of the Father of our Country. His passing is a loss to the Mount Vernon community and indeed the nation. I respectfully submit Jim Rees' obituary from The Washington Post and ask my colleagues to join me in honoring Jim's life and achievements.

[Sept. 13, 2014]

JAMES C. REES, 62, LONGTIME PRESIDENT OF GEORGE WASHINGTON'S MOUNT VERNON, DIES
(By Emily Langer)

James C. Rees, who endeavored to keep George Washington first in the hearts of his countrymen, and particularly in the hearts of his country's tourists, as president for nearly two decades of the founding father's Mount Vernon estate, died Sept. 9 at his home in Markham, Va. He was 62.

The cause was multiple system atrophy, a neurological disorder, said his husband, Kirk Blandford.

Mr. Rees spent nearly his entire career at Mount Vernon, the stately home 15 miles outside the District in Virginia, where George Washington lived for decades and where he was buried after his death in 1799.

After working in the development office and as the estate's associate director, Mr. Rees became in 1994 Mount Vernon's executive director, a title later changed to president. He moved into a home on the grounds overlooking the Potomac River and became, he said, the public relations agent for the nation's first president.

The nonprofit Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, which has independently owned and maintained the property since 1860, credited Mr. Rees with leading fundraising initiatives that brought more than \$250 million to the estate. During his nearly three decades with the institution, its endowment grew from \$4 million to more than \$100 million, according to the group.

"It has been said that George Washington was the 'indispensable man,'" observed Barbara B. Lucas, the regent of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, adding that Mr. Rees "likewise was an indispensable man to Mount Vernon in his time."

Mr. Rees's tenure as president coincided with what he and other George Washington enthusiasts feared was a growing ignorance about American history, particularly among the young. Once, Mr. Rees encountered a group of students and began joking with them—"you know, playing off some of the Washington myths," he told the Weekly Standard.

"I said, 'Well, it's a good thing this isn't a cherry tree, or it might be in danger—you never know who might come chop it down.' And there was no reaction. Nothing. So I said, 'But I guess we could always use the wood to make some teeth.' Nothing. Blank stares."

Mr. Rees led a years-long mission to enliven the visitor experience at Mount Vernon and to invigorate the image of the president who lived there. Washington, Mr. Rees remarked, seemed to be locked in the national imagination as the rather dour-looking gentlemen on the \$1 bill.

"Washington was athletic, adventurous and risk-taking, known to be one of the finest horsemen of his day and willing to meet challenges head-on," Mr. Rees once told the New York Times. "Some have called him the nation's first action hero."

At the Ford Orientation Center, a building opened in 2006 with sponsorship from the Ford Motor Co., visitors watch a film described as an "action-adventure" movie about Washington's military exploits and personal life.

The Donald W. Reynolds Museum and Education Center, which also opened at Mount Vernon in 2006, includes theaters, interactive displays and galleries with artifacts from Washington's life, including the bedstead he used during the Revolutionary War, his sword and, perhaps best known, his dentures.

The teeth in particular represented a departure from what had previously been the organization's conservative presentation of the former president.

"We used to be so discreet that we didn't want to display Washington's dentures," Mr. Rees told the Times. "When we finally broke down and showed them, they turned out to be a sensation. That taught us something."

Mr. Rees also oversaw the restoration and reconstruction of Mount Vernon's whiskey distillery and gristmill. One of his last undertakings was fundraising for the \$106 million Fred W. Smith National Library for the Study of George Washington, which opened in 2013, the year after Mr. Rees retired.

James Conway Rees IV was born May 5, 1952, in Richmond. The history textbooks he used as a youngster, he often said with chagrin, devoted significantly more space to Washington than can be found in books used today.

He was a 1974 English graduate of the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg and received a master's degree in public administration from George Washington University in 1978. Before joining Mount Vernon in 1983, he did development work for William & Mary and for the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Mr. Rees often reflected on the challenges of promoting Washington in the modern age.

"I suppose it has to do with lots of things," he once told the Weekly Standard. "The rise of social history—filling up history with all kinds of people who'd been ignored before means there's less room for old heroes. And I suppose it has to do with the end of the great man theory of history, too."

"But there's something else that worries me," he continued. "The qualities Wash-

ington possessed just aren't as appreciated as they were. Honesty. Good judgment. Modesty—my God, who in late-20th-century America gets credit for being modest anymore?"

In 2007, Mr. Rees published a book, "George Washington's Leadership Lessons: What the Father of Our Country Can Teach Us About Effective Leadership and Character."

Survivors include Kirk Blandford, his partner of 29 years, whom he married last year, of Markham; and a brother.

On one occasion, Mr. Rees was called upon to correct an oversight by Washington, who had borrowed from the New York Society Library "The Law of Nations," Emer de Vattel's 18th-century political treatise, and failed to return it.

By the time the matter came to Mr. Rees's attention, the item was more than two centuries overdue. He returned a copy to its rightful owner.

CONTINUING APPROPRIATIONS
RESOLUTION, 2015

SPEECH OF

HON. CHRIS VAN HOLLEN

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, September 17, 2014

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Speaker, I support the core pillars of the President's plan to fight ISIS—the use of American surveillance, intelligence assets and air power to support the ground operations of the Iraqi army and Kurdish fighters in Iraq, and to strike ISIS military equipment, troop concentrations, and command and control in Syria. I also believe we should supply weapons to those groups in Syria, such as the Syrian Kurds, who have consistently fought ISIS, and whose priority is to defeat ISIS. I welcome the opportunity to work with my colleagues to revise the existing 2001 Authorization to Use Military Force to more clearly support these objectives, but to also ensure that U.S. ground forces are not engaged in combat in Iraq or Syria.

My one concern with the Administration's plan relates to the proposal to arm the so-called "moderate" Syrian opposition. I believe that it is a well-intentioned proposal that will have unintended negative consequences that will not serve our ultimate goal of defeating ISIS.

First, the primary objective of these Sunni Islamist fighters is the defeat of Assad and his Alawite dominated regime—not the defeat of ISIS. Since the start of the war there have been shifting alliances among these Sunni Islamist forces that include the al-Qaeda affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusra, different elements of the Free Syrian Army, the Islamist Front, Ahrar al-Sham and ISIS, among others. Their common cause and overriding objective is defeating Assad. Indeed, the commander of the Syria Revolutionaries' Front, Jamal Maarouf, one of the most militarily proficient commanders of the FSA, recently said that, "It's clear that I'm not fighting against al-Qaeda. This is a problem outside of Syria's border, so it's not our problem. I don't have a problem with anyone who fights against the regime inside Syria."

While there is no doubt that Assad is a brutal dictator, he does not pose the same threat to the United States as ISIS, and his forces have recently been battling ISIS. At this point, arming fighters whose primary purpose is to