

EXPRESSING THE CONDOLENCES
OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTA-
TIVES ON THE DEATH OF THE
HONORABLE TOM LANTOS, A
REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
STATE OF CALIFORNIA

SPEECH OF

HON. BRIAN BAIRD

OF WASHINGTON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 12, 2008

Mr. BAIRD. Madam Speaker, I wish to share the perspectives of former Congressman Don Bonker on his distinguished colleague during his service in the House, the Honorable TOM LANTOS.

Tom Lantos was an extraordinary person in so many respects. The only member of Congress to survive the Holocaust, his passionate commitment to human rights, a widely respected authority on foreign policy, and one who worked closely with every administration, regardless of party, and world leaders to insure that democracy, not tyranny, reign in our lifetime.

There was also the extraordinary personal side of Tom Lantos. His confinement and courageous escape from a Nazi-operated forced labor camp in Szob, Hungary, led to his befriending the Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg, who gave him safety in his Budapest apartment and eventual freedom and relocation to the United States.

Mysteriously, Raoul Wallenberg disappeared behind the Soviet Union, never to be heard from again. But Tom and his wife, Annette, never forgot the man who saved their lives, and the 40,000 others whose lives were spared because Raoul Wallenberg, at high personal risk, issued fake passports that enabled them to leave the country.

I first met Tom Lantos before he came to Congress in 1978. As chairman of the subcommittee on human rights, it was suggested I talk to Annette Lantos about the fate of Raoul Wallenberg. Both Annette and Tom gave eloquent testimony before my subcommittee. Later, Tom Lantos wrote and passed resolutions and had a statue placed in the U.S. Capital honoring Raoul Wallenberg. The teenagers from Budapest have spent a life-time honoring the man who saved their lives.

For many years, I traveled with the Lantos' all over Europe, including, to Russia, Romania and Hungary. They were committed first and foremost to the cause of human rights and strengthening democracies, especially in the countries of the former Soviet Union. There was no more eloquent voice or effective champion on these issues than Tom and Annette Lantos, a true legacy that will endure for generations to come.

There is another Lantos legacy. As a parent of 2 daughters, he took great pride in their 17 incredible grandchildren, all of whom are fulfilling the highest expectations of their grandfather. Every year the Lantos Christmas card displayed a growing family of beautiful and gifted children who obviously gave them considerable pride and joy.

In the Congress, Tom Lantos had no peers. He was respected by leaders of both political parties and the undisputed authority on foreign policy. Most newly elected Congressmen avoid the Foreign Affairs Committee because there is little that can help in their constituencies, but for Tom Lantos it was always about foreign relations. Indeed he ranks, alongside Lee Hamilton, as one of the two finest chairmen who ever presided over the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

For those who had the privilege of knowing Tom Lantos, there is even more legacy. His eloquence and charm, personal loyalty to family and friends, his diplomatic grace in meeting world leaders, left one with the impression of being near a truly great leader and genuine statesman of the world. It was a privilege to have known Tom Lantos.