



Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC

July 22, 2015

Mr. James Blackston
6185 Highway 195
Jasper, AL 35503

Dear Mr. Blackston:

Thank you for writing me regarding the Confederate flag. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to your concerns.

On June 17, 2015, Dylann Roof, a 21-year-old from Eastover, SC opened fire on congregants at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Charleston, SC. Using a .45 caliber handgun, he shot ten people at close range. Nine people lost their lives, including the senior pastor of the church and SC State Senator Clementa Pinckney.

Roof's online presence before the shooting included the heavy use of Confederate flag imagery. As such, many state and local officials have reconsidered the use of the Confederate flag on government property, including Alabama Governor Robert Bentley, who ordered the flag to be removed from State House grounds. South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley also urged the SC State Legislature to pass legislation taking down the Confederate flag from a Confederate War memorial on the state's Capitol grounds.

Of interest, the Confederate flag as most Americans know it was originally, specifically, the battle flag of the Army of Northern Virginia and served as one of several flags used by the Confederacy. Historically, the battle flag did not represent the Confederate States of America as a whole, but over time it has come to symbolize these states.

In *Pleasant Grove City v. Sumnum*, the U.S. Supreme Court found that when state or local officials place monuments on government property, those government entities are engaged in a valid form of governmental speech. Thus, the decision to keep or remove the flag on public property (not including federal

property) belongs to States and localities. As states make their decisions, it is important that we respect the Constitutional rights of each person, and the inalienable, God-given rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

On July 7, 2015, the House voted on several amendments to the Interior Appropriations bill related to the display of the Confederate flag on federal land. Rep. Jared Huffman (D-CA) introduced H. Amdt. 586, to prohibit the use of funds by National Parks to sell items that have the Confederate flag as a stand-alone feature. The House passed this amendment by voice vote.

Rep. Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) introduced H. Amdt. 606 to prohibit the use of funds by the National Parks Service (NPS) to purchase a Confederate flag, unless such a purchase is warranted by an NPS memorandum, and it provides historical context. The House passed this amendment by voice vote.

The House also passed by voice vote Rep. Jared Huffman's (D-CA) amendment (H. Amdt. 592) to prohibit the use of funds to implement NPS Director's Order #61 that allows a grave in any Federal cemetery to be decorated with a Confederate flag. On July 8, 2015, however, Rep. Ken Calvert (R-CA) introduced an amendment (H. Amdt. 651) that would prohibit the use of funds to change existing NPS policies on Confederate flags. A recorded vote on this amendment was requested, but it has not yet occurred. The House has not yet completed amendment debate on the Interior Appropriations bill nor voted on final passage; as of July 20, no date has been set for further action.

Please be assured that I will continue to monitor this matter and keep your concerns in mind as debate proceeds.

Again, thank you for contacting me regarding this issue. I hope you will continue to do so on any issue where I may be of assistance.

Sincerely,



Robert B. Aderholt
Member of Congress

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