

TESTIMONY OF DANIEL MEEK ON HB 2880

May 1, 2017

I support HB 2880, which extends the obligation to fly the National League of Families POW/MIA flag to all county, municipal, school district and special district buildings upon which or near which it is customary and suitable to display the United States flag.

Some of my friends ask, "How can the government of Oregon endorse the National League of Families, considering its history and that of its founder and 38-year chief executive, Ann Mills Griffiths?" I tell them that flying the National League of Families flag at public buildings does not constitute a government endorsement of that group or its leader or policies or practices or history. It merely allows that group to convey its message to the public.

Well, my friends say, the Report of the U.S. Senate Select Committee on POW /MIA Affairs in 1993 concluded that Ann Mills Griffiths was a key figure in Operation Skyhook II, a secret operation that provided about \$600,000 in funding to armed rebels in Laos in the mid-1980s. The money came from many of the same wealthy persons who funded to the armed Contra rebels in Nicaragua as part of the Iran-Contra operation, under the management of Oliver North at the National Security Council. The Senate Committee, headed by Senator Charles Grassley, stated that Ann Mills Griffiths collected the funds through a nonprofit corporation and transferred the funds to an account in Thailand for the Laotian rebel forces.

The Senate Committee unanimously asked the Justice Department to open a criminal investigation of Ann Mills Griffiths for possible perjury, obstruction of justice, and violations of the Neutrality Act. But she refuted the allegations and said that she was told that the money would

help the Laotian rebel forces find information about MIAs in Laos.¹ She was not indicted.

My friends say, "What about the Newsweek opinion piece² in 2015 that said that the National League of Families and ITS POW/MIA flag are racist?" The author, Rick Perlstein (historian and author of several books, including NIXONLAND), later apologized for that statement.

So what are the remaining reasons to oppose this bill? Some say that flying the National League of Families flag at public buildings is a government endorsement of that group, its leader, policies, practices, and/or history. I ask them about Tri-Met. I see trains and buses covered with messages to the public. That does not mean that the government is speaking, is telling me that KGW has the best news broadcast. Tri-Met is just letting private organizations convey their messages to the public. The same is true here.

You may want to reassure my friends that this bill does not put the government in the business of making proclamations about the value of a particular private organization or its causes but merely allows the group to communicate with the public.

1. Probe Links "Reagan Doctrine" to Covert Aid to Laos Rebels, LOS ANGELES TIMES, January 23, 1993.

Use of POW-MIA Groups in Covert Operations Alleged: Justice Dept. urged to probe Senate charges that aid was funneled to Laotian rebels, LOS ANGELES TIMES, January 14, 1993

2. <http://www.newsweek.com/its-time-haul-down-another-flag-racist-hate-361929>