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A Star-Spangled Project by Senator Larry Craig

On September 13, 1814, Francis Scott Key sat, terrified, detained by the British Navy, in a ship in the Baltimore Harbor. The British relentlessly bombarded the Harbor, to the point that Key thought they certainly would triumph and occupy it. When the explosions stopped, when the air cleared, when he could safely look outside after 25 hours of continuous bombardment, he could see the Star-Spangled Banner they had “so proudly hailed at twilights last gleaming” catching “the morning’s first beam, In full glory reflected now shines in the stream.”

The moment of seeing Old Glory waving – tattered by the British, but still standing, symbolizing the freedoms our Founders declared to the whole world just 38 years earlier -- moved him to pen a poem that now stands as our national anthem.

“The Star-Spangled Banner” reflects Key’s depth of emotion at realizing that America, and all she stands for, had prevailed, evidenced by the symbol waving in the morning breezes of Fort McHenry. The poem was put to music, “Anacreon in Heaven” (attributed to a British composer named John Stafford Smith), at the suggestion of Key’s brother-in-law, Judge J.H. Nicholson. Most Americans recognize this music. It is the music that drives us, instinctively, to stand, place our hands over our hearts, and turn toward our flag, the symbol the song praises.

However, it is the words, not the music, that really comprise our national anthem, and those words are unknown to a surprising two-thirds of adult Americans. In fact, many can’t even tell you what our national anthem is, and many don’t realize there are four verses.

Thankfully the National Association for Music Educators sparked a project to remedy this by teaching children the national anthem. Titled the National Anthem Project (www.nationalanthemproject.org), this effort has grown tremendously. With sponsors from Jeep to the Oak Ridge Boys to the History Channel, organizations and individuals across this land are working together to teach Americans their national anthem.

I applaud their efforts and have been working to ensure there is appropriate and necessary support from the federal government. An amendment of mine was approved so that the Senate bill funding the U.S. Department of Education encourages that agency to partner with the National Anthem Project.

Teaching our children our national anthem will take more than donations from corporations or taxpayers – it will take the effort of parents and teachers. I encourage you, if you don’t already, to learn the words of “The Star-Spangled Banner.” You can view them at <http://www.tnap.org/lyrics.html>.

[MORE]

Each time I hear it sung or read the lyrics, I'm moved. They are powerful words talking about powerful ideas – ideas that shape our country and make it the light it is to this world. I hope the words -- and, more important, the ideas -- don't fade into history but are preserved for generations to come. We owe it not only to those who defended Old Glory in Baltimore Harbor in 1814, but to those future citizens who will call this land of the free their country.