

CROCKETT BOX 50
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NEWS



Geo. W. Crockett, Jr. CONGRESSMAN

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CONGRESSMAN CROCKETT BLASTS UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

FOR SNUB OF NELSON MANDELA

Washington, D.C. -- Congressman Geo. W. Crockett, Jr. (D-Michigan) today released the copy of a letter he has sent to Dr. Harold Shapiro, president of the University of Michigan, and members of the university's Board of Regents, expressing his deep disappointment in the Board's decision not to confer an honorary degree on Nelson Mandela at its May commencement ceremony.

Mr. Crockett said, in part:

"The denial of a degree to Mr. Mandela for the reasons publicly stated -- that is, in accordance with a prevailing tradition of not awarding honorary degrees to those 'in absentia' -- is truly unfortunate. I believe such a denial demeans the truly meaningful traditions of our University, and exhibits either a disregard for, or an ignorance of, the extraordinary circumstances of the current situation in South Africa.

"As an alumnus of the University, a strong supporter of its enlightened programs over the years, and a Member of Congress from Michigan, I am extremely disappointed in the University for its failure to take a stand on this issue."

Congressman Crockett has agreed to address a group of students at the University of Michigan on Saturday morning, May 3, as they gather to honor Nelson Mandela, the widely-respected leader of the Black population of South Africa who has been imprisoned since 1962 for his resistance against apartheid. The ceremony will be held prior to the formal commencement, scheduled for Saturday afternoon in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Congressman Crockett is the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Africa of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and is the author of the "Mandela Freedom Resolution", which was passed by the 98th Congress in 1984. He is also the national chairman of the Lawyers Campaign to Free Nelson Mandela, an organization formed last October to encourage lawyers, jurists, legal educators, legislators and law students to unite in a call for the unconditional release of Nelson Mandela.

Mr. Crockett was recently named the recipient of the first "Nelson Mandela Award" by the Association of African Jurists.

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He recently introduced a resolution in the U.S. House of Representatives calling on South Africa to begin meaningful political negotiations with that country's Black majority. The resolution, which now has 59 cosponsors, also urges the release of Nelson Mandela and the recognition of the African National Congress as a legitimate representative of the Black South African community.

The complete text of the Congressman's letter is as follows:

April 24, 1986

Dr. Harold T. Shapiro
President,
The University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109

Dear Dr. Shapiro:

I am deeply disturbed by the refusal of the University of Michigan to confer an honorary degree at its May commencement on Nelson Mandela because of his inability to leave a South African jail.

The denial of a degree to Mr. Mandela for the reasons publicly stated -- that is, in accordance with a prevailing tradition of not awarding honorary degrees to those "in absentia" -- is truly unfortunate. I believe such a denial demeans the truly meaningful traditions of our University, and exhibits either a disregard for, or an ignorance of, the extraordinary circumstances of the current situation in South Africa.

As an alumnus of the University, a strong supporter of its enlightened programs over the years, and a Member of Congress from Michigan, I am extremely disappointed in the University for its failure to take a stand on this issue.

I cannot think of a better nominee than Nelson Mandela for the University's Doctor of Humane Letters degree. He is today the leading symbol of resistance to political and economic oppression and to race and color prejudice not only in South Africa, but throughout the world. By honoring him, the University not only would express its abhorrence of apartheid, but also pay tribute to those who fight racism and intolerance wherever it exists in our world.

In addition, by making this honorary award to Mr. Mandela, the University of Michigan would tell America's non-white community that, notwithstanding some recent perceptions to the contrary, it continues steadfast in its determination to support forces of justice, equality and freedom for all men and women everywhere. Surely the prevailing rule of absentia pales when compared to the urgent need for action in support of these principles and their application in South Africa.

An institution such as the University of Michigan cannot afford to hide behind outdated rules or traditions when faced with issues of such significance.

Sincerely,

Geo. W. Crockett, Jr.
Member of Congress

cc: University of Michigan
Board of Regents