

News Release: Amherst (MA) Special Town Meeting Approves Resolution to Welcome Cleared Guantánamo Detainees

November 4, 2009 - On Wednesday evening, Amherst Special Town Meeting approved a resolution welcoming one or two cleared Guantánamo Bay detainees to the community once Congress lifts its current ban. It is the first municipality in the nation to do so.

The resolution, Article 14 on the Special Town Meeting warrant, was the last article considered. Ruth Hooke drafted the article and was its lead petitioner. She is a town meeting member and a founding member of the local organization Pioneer Valley No More Guantánamos.

Meg Gage, in her presentation supporting the article, observed that “of the 225 men still at Guantánamo, more than 70 have been cleared for release, ... but some of those men can’t return home without risk of torture or death.” She went on to explain, “They need other countries that are willing to take them, and the U.S.—whose government established the prison as a law-free zone—refuses to take any, putting all the pressure on other countries.”

Gerry Weiss, a select board member, followed Gage. “People are suffering unjustly, and we have the opportunity to alleviate that suffering.”

Carol Gray was among several other town meeting members who spoke in support. “Even the Nazi war criminals had trials,” she said. Gray showed the audience one of the leaflets the military dropped from airplanes, offering large bounties for turning in “terrorists.” She also showed photos and shared brief stories of some of the young men and boys who have been released from the prison.

Nancy Talanian, director of No More Guantánamos and a member, with Hooke, of its Pioneer Valley chapter, applauded the measure’s passage, which is the first of its kind in the country. She said, “Amherst’s resolution supports the basic right of freedom for cleared Guantánamo Bay detainees who cannot safely return to their home countries. Without cooperation from U.S. communities and Congress, the long-awaited plan to close Guantánamo may not succeed.” She noted that Congress’s recent not-in-our-back-yard ban stands in the way of encouraging international cooperation in closing the prison.

Amherst Town Meeting is the town’s governing body. Its 250 members are elected by precinct to represent the town.

Prior to Amherst’s resolution, local groups prepared to welcome 17 Uighur detainees from Guantánamo who had been cleared years earlier. In 2008, the U.S.’s largest community of ethnic Chinese Uighurs, located in Fairfax County, Virginia, offered to house most of the men. An interfaith coalition in Tallahassee, Florida, arranged housing and other necessities for three of the men with the best English language skills.

No More Guantánamos [<http://www.nogitmos.org> [1]] is a coalition of concerned U.S. residents, communities, organizations, and attorneys who are working together to ensure justice for the prisoners at Guantánamo Bay, Bagram air base in Afghanistan, and other offshore prison sites maintained by the CIA and the Pentagon around the world. We work to ensure basic human rights for all prisoners, including the right to be either charged for crimes and tried or released, in accordance with international law, and not held indefinitely, and to find homes for prisoners who cannot return home.

The organization formed soon after President Obama’s executive order to close Guantánamo Bay prison by January 22, 2009. Chapter locations besides the Pioneer Valley include Raleigh-Durham,

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North Carolina; Fort Collins, Colorado; and Tallahassee, Florida.

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Media Advisory:

- Download photograph here of [l-r] Nancy Talanian, Gerry Weiss, and Ruth Hooke
- Text of Resolution by the Town of Amherst, MA, to Assist in the Safe Resettlement of Cleared Guantánamo Detainees, <http://www.nogitmos.org/resolutiontownamherstmaassistsaferesettlementclearedguant%C3%A1namodetainees> [2]
- Statement from Area Clergy to Amherst Town Meeting, <http://www.nogitmos.org/statementareaclergyamhersttownmeeting> [3]
- Website of No More Guantánamos, <http://www.nogitmos.org> [1]

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