

A Well Deserved Tribute To Heitor Sousa

Share

volume 148 , number 56 | pages e738-e739 | extensions of remarks | [tue. may 7. 2002](#)

Rep. Barney Frank



D | MA

Mr. Speaker, last month, in Fall River, Massachusetts, a very impressive tribute was paid to Heitor Sousa, one of the leaders in the Portuguese American community. Heitor Sousa came to the U.S. in 1981 from the Azores, and he is an example of the way in which immigration enriches our country economically, culturally, and socially. I have been privileged to benefit from Heitor Sousa's friendship, advice, and wisdom for 20 years, during the time I have represented parts of Southeastern Massachusetts in this body. I want to add my own personal gratitude to him for the extraordinary service he has performed both for the people of Southeastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island and for the residents of Portugal in general and the Azores in particular. The tribute paid to him was extremely well deserved.

Fall River.--Flanked by good friends and hundreds of admirers, Heitor Sousa, the founder of the Great Feast of the Holy ghost of New England, was honored yesterday in a ceremony that was described as ``a happy and loving tribute." Guests traveled from as far away as Toronto and the Azores to attend the ceremony hosted by the Our Lady of Light Band Band. Sousa, 63, immigrated to the United States in 1981 to establish the Banco Comercial dos Acores branch on Pleasant Street and within five years founded the annual Portuguese Battle of the Bands and the Great Feast. He has also been a strong advocate for the continuation of the bands and an increase in performances. ``Heitor Sousa is a `grand homem' (a great man)," said Fall River Diocese Bishop Sean P. O'Malley as he opened the ceremony. Rhode Island General Treasurer Paul Tavares told the large jam-packed crowd that he met Sousa in 1984. ``We formed a great friendship," Tavares said. ``I have a great deal of respect for this man, who is dedicated to his community, his homeland, this new land and his Azorean culture." Fall River State Representative Robert Correia told the crowd that Sousa's life tale has been entered into the state's official archives, ``where it will be forever." He added that Sousa helped him understand his culture better and even took him to the homeland to foster a better connection. Turning to the crowd, Correia said that Sousa is very

much like the Braga and Mount Hope bridges that many of the Rhode Islanders took to attend the hall. "Heitor is a bridge from the Azores to Fall River," said Correia. "He traveled the bumpy road from the Azores to here and took me and a few of us on the bumpy road from here to the Azores. He is not a man of words but a man of action." Rev. Luis Cardoso, formerly of Espirito Santo Church and now of Sao Miguel Church of Fall River, said it will never be known how many people Sousa has helped in his life. "He has done so much for the community, but all he did was driven by his faith," he said. Mayor Edward M. Lambert, Jr. told the crowd that he was befriended by Sousa many years ago and despite a language barrier the two have worked well together. "That's because he has always spoken the language of the heart," said Lambert. He added that if one could equate one's spirit with song, then "the life of Heitor Sousa has been a beautiful concert." He praised the work Sousa has done in founding the feast, adding "it is a great source of pride for everyone in Fall River. No other event brings so many people--so many eyes from all over the world to this great city. For this, you will always be remembered. Heitor Sousa you are a treasure in this community, which we value tremendously." The master of ceremonies for the event, Manuel F. Estrela, broke up the praise with his own humor. Saying that he could not stand by and see only good things said about his old friend, he joked that it was time to talk about Sousa's shortcomings. "He is a great 'Sportinguista,'" he said to the roar of the crowd. A sportinguista is a fan of the Portugal's Sporting Soccer team. Sousa was also praised by two of the Azores top journalists. Jorge Nascimento Cabral, a retired publisher of Correio dos Acores, and Osvaldo Cabral of RTP-Azores. Both men said they could not have missed the event. "His roots are deeply planted on both sides of the Atlantic," said Cabral of RTP. "I see in him the greatest recognition of faith, of fatherhood, of grand fatherhood, husbandry and community service." Cabral said that back in his village of Rabo de Peixe the youth all know of Sousa's work. "He is a great example for us who are older and for the younger generation," he said. Jorge Cabral, the featured speaker, talked about how Sousa rose from his small village to be a mountain of a man on two sides of the ocean. "It is not easy for someone to come from an island, from Rabo de Peixe, and leave to go to a country where they speak a different language and lead a cultural revival," he said. "But he has given a new meaning to the word 'saudade.' He has always been in the service of the people. And he has carried with him the greatest symbol of the Azores--people's faith. This is a very dynamic man who has served his community, fostered many organizations, but never profited monetarily just through the peace of his conscious." On several occasions Sousa became choked up. Tears swelled in his eyes during a surprise performance by the Our lady of Light Band, which played a song Sousa once led while he was the director of the Banda Lira do Norte in Rabo de Peixe-- "marcha de Cigano." After the speeches, Sousa was presented with a portrait by the Banda da Luz, which they said would hang in their club forever. He was also given a check for \$1,849, the profits from the banquet, but in typical Sousa fashion he donated it back, saying that he wanted it to be designated for a fund to be given to the top student of each of the 15 Portuguese bands of New England. Minutes later Carlos

Andrade of Sharon pledged to give \$5,000 to bolster the very fund. In a touching closing ceremony, Sousa was presented plaques by all of the bands that he has championed over the years. He also thanked those gathered, including Estrela, the Cabrals, all of the bands and their leadership, as well as Luis Silva and Antonio Carvalho of the Light Band. Sousa also took the time to thank his wife, ``who has been suffering me for 40 years," he said. He ended his speech with a challenge to the leaders of the community and in the Azores, saying that they must do more to support the bands. He added that the Azores should host an annual ban performance, which incorporates bands from the United States and the islands. ``Our bands are often forgotten by our leaders," he added.