

EXTENDING MOST-FAVORED-NATION STATUS TO ROMANIA

SPEECH OF

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 16, 1996

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I rise in opposition to the House voting to extend permanently MFN for Romania, H.R. 3161. Romania has just completed, after three rounds, its election of local officials throughout the country, and national elections are now set for early November. I strongly believe that the House should consider the legislation before us only after Romania's national elections.

There are a number of issues, from freedom of the media and rights of the minorities to democratic reform, which remain unresolved. Romania enjoys all the benefits of MFN under the current semiannual review process, and granting permanent MFN now will remove this important review of these remaining issues of concern and the conduct of the upcoming elections. Mr. Speaker, we all know that within a democratic system, the political will to address outstanding problems is always greater during an election season. Let the 105th Congress consider this issue after Romania's national elections.

The current MFN review process has served as a helpful opportunity to gauge Romania's democratic reform and their respect for human rights. Freedom of the media, for example, continues to be a concern. Under Romanian law, individuals who are convicted of insulting or defaming public officials can be subjected to prison terms. The Romanian Senate recently passed legislation which would increase these criminal penalties if the insults are committed in the written or audiovisual press. This type of potential liability, in my opinion, has a chilling effect on the media.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of Romania should ensure absolutely the freedom of the media—at all times—but particularly during the heat of election campaigns. Unfavorable commentary by the media regarding government officials should not be viewed as a threat to national security and result in calls for restrictions on those who dare to criticize. I was dismayed by the reaction of the chairman of the ruling party in Romania to critical news reports filed by the local BBC correspondent during the recent local election campaign. Chairman Adrian Nastase, who is also President of the Romanian Chamber of Deputies, attacked the BBC for its critical reporting and called on the national licensing agency to review that respected international news organization's right to rebroadcast on local Romanian radio stations.

Minority rights continue to be of concern. Ethnic minorities face certain restrictions to their receiving, at the higher levels in particular, instruction in their native language, and a law was passed which now limits the taking of college entrance exams solely in Romanian. This law was not implemented this year but the law remains on the books. And official obstacles remain which prevent the restoration of the Hungarian university in Cluj.

Human rights are best protected by governments which must answer to their electorate. As with any fledgling democracy, the campaign season for the just completed local elec-

tions and the conduct of the national elections in the fall are particularly important tests for Romania's commitment to freedom of the press, their conduct of orderly, free, and fair elections, and their provision for domestic observers for the national elections. Reports from objective election observers clearly indicate that the conduct of the local elections did not allay the potential problems which had been raised by NGO's. The most serious concerns included widespread, gross inaccuracy of the voter lists; significant logistical problems which arise when campaign periods are truncated; and uneven interpretation of the election law by local officials with no central election bureau to serve as arbiter, which contributed to inconsistencies around the country and even a lack of trust in the system.

In my view, Mr. Speaker, projecting a vote in the U.S. Congress on the political landscape of Romania would certainly be seen as a congressional judgment on Romania's current political leaders. The vote tallies of the recently held local elections indicate strong, grassroots support for the opposition parties. In fact, the ruling Party of Social Democracy in Romania and the opposition Democratic Convention of Romania [CDR] received about equal percentages of the vote in the mayors' races. The CDR and other opposition parties, including representatives of the Hungarian minority, significantly out-poll the ruling party in country, city, and mayoral races in many regions. Mr. Speaker, this is a political environment in which every issue, especially closely watched foreign policy issues such as Romania's MFN status with the United States, affects the voters' perception of the effectiveness of the ruling party.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of areas in which the Romanian Government could take timely and constructive steps to ensure that the national elections are conducted in a way which garners confidence in the electoral process. I hope and expect that the Government of Romania will make every effort to ensure that the national elections in November are conducted on the basis of up-to-date, accurate voting lists in each locality, backed up by consistent and uniform interpretation of the election law by local officials. In my view, the establishment of a permanent, professional election bureau would ensure such consistency and accuracy, and go a long way toward enhancing voter confidence in the system.

Finally, it is unclear at this time whether domestic election observers will be permitted at the polling stations in November. A one-time provision for local observers was made during the 1992 national elections, however this authorization has not been renewed. Mr. Speaker, in my view domestic as well as international observers are crucial to ensuring the conduct of free and fair elections. Domestic observers play a positive role in enhancing public confidence in the electoral process and the experience of election monitoring gives ordinary Romanian citizens an opportunity to develop skills and experience applicable to other aspects of democratic citizenship.

I am hopeful and expectant that Romania's next leaders will be chosen through elections which will be free, fair and representative, and that the protection of human rights will continue to improve under the newly elected government. I urge my colleagues to vote against H.R. 3161 today. The people of Romania have had the benefits of MFN since 1992. Making

the judgement about the transition to permanent status should be undertaken only after these critical elections are completed in November.

CABLE'S COMMITMENT TO EDUCATION

HON. NEWT GINGRICH

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, July 24, 1996

Mr. GINGRICH. I would like to applaud a recently announced initiative by the cable industry to bring Internet access to schools free of charge. When students can use state-of-the-art technology, they are equipped for bright futures:

CABLE'S ON-GOING COMMITMENT TO EDUCATION

The cable industry has a long-standing, on-going commitment to use its state-of-the-art technology and quality programming to provide enhanced learning resources for America's students. Cable's High Speed Education Connection is the latest contribution. This initiative builds on the foundation established by the industry's education centerpiece, Cable in the Classroom, and continues to demonstrate how cable technology expands our children's educational opportunities with capabilities unmatched by any other telecommunications provider or technology. The industry's commitment manifests itself in a number of programs and initiatives, including:

CABLE IN THE CLASSROOM

Since 1989, Cable in the Classroom has been the foundation of the cable industry's educational commitment. Cable systems and program networks collectively have spent over \$420 million on Cable in the Classroom, a program that benefits students by connecting schools to cable's network, free of charge, and donating other technology, commercial-free programming and curriculum materials. Involving 8,400 cable systems and 32 national cable networks, Cable in the Classroom currently reaches over 38 million students in more than 74,000 schools with over 6,000 hours of commercial-free, educational programming every year—at no cost to schools.

THE FAMILY & COMMUNITY CRITICAL VIEWING PROJECT

The Family & Community Critical Viewing Project is a partnership of the National PTA and the cable industry that provides parents, teachers and children with critical viewing skills to evaluate and analyze what they see on TV. The project is designed to help families make better, more informed choices of the TV shows they watch. Launched in 1994, Critical Viewing Workshops offer parents and teachers concrete steps to control the effects of TV violence and commercialism on young people. To date, more than 1,500 cable & PTA partners have been trained, over 1,000 workshops have been presented nationwide, and more than 75,000 copies of "How to Take Charge of Your TV," a critical viewing resource guide, have been distributed.

CABLE IN FOCUS

Cable in Focus teams cable operators with cable networks to conduct a series of educational screening events each year, promoting high-quality, original cable programming selected according to a theme (e.g. literacy, the environment, diversity). In the past year alone, more than 400 cable systems

have hosted over 800 screenings, providing students with an opportunity to view the abundance of high-quality, educational programming exclusive to cable TV and to engage in interactive group discussions on the various issues addressed by the programming.

DISTANCE LEARNING

Cable's state-of-the-art technology has also provided additional learning opportunities for at-home students, with cable systems across the country delivering instruction and learning opportunities directly to the home from leading universities and other continuing education providers. Distance learning, too, has grown with cable's advanced technology, now featuring virtual "electronic field trips," with students interacting via satellite and over the Internet in real-time to visit and learn with experts in the field from the Berlin Wall, to the rain forests of Costa Rica, the plains of Kenya, and many more.

TRIBUTE TO OFFICER TODD SHELTON

HON. PAUL E. GILLMOR

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, July 24, 1996

Mr. GILLMOR. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the actions of a brave police Officer. Recently, Officer Todd Shelton's quick thinking and cool judgement are responsible for saving the life of a potential drowning victim.

On June 23, 1996 in the Village of Put-In-Bay, OH, Officer Shelton observed a man stumbling on a municipal dock off Lake Erie. The man fell in the water and became trapped beneath a boat. Quickly running to the scene, Officer Shelton located the victim and jumped in after him. By going beneath the water, the officer was able to grab the victim's shirt, free him, and bring him to the surface for air. After making sure he was breathing, Officer Shelton pulled him from the water and summoned medics to treat numerous cuts and abrasions on the victim. Had Officer Shelton not responded in the manner he did, the victim would have assuredly drowned.

Mr. Speaker, Officer Shelton's actions represent the courageous decisions made everyday by police officers all across Ohio and America. These dedicated personnel continue to exemplify the good characteristics in society and are tremendous role models for our children. By risking his own life, Officer Shelton was able to save another. Too often, we forget the awesome responsibilities we ask our safety personnel, whether it is firemen, police, or Coast Guard, to undertake. Safe and responsible behavior is not just important in protecting ourselves but also those whose profession is to serve and protect.

I ask my colleagues to join me in commending Officer Todd Shelton on his good work and encourage him to continue to serve his community with such dedication.

MURRAY AND BEATRICE SAFRAN
HONORED

HON. ELIOT L. ENGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, July 24, 1996

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, Murray and Beatrice Safran are a living affirmation of the institution of marriage. It was 50 years ago, on February 17, 1946, that they were married. They had five children and have contributed to their community and their country with pride and distinction.

Murray served in the U.S. Army from 1942–46 after which he was a guidance counselor and social studies teacher and United Federation of Teachers chapter chairman. He was also active in the Jewish War Veterans. In 1994, he was named Man of the Year by the Association of Americans and Canadians in Israel. Beatrice served as cochairperson of the Association for Help of Retarded Children, as secretary to the president of Hebrew University and involved herself in politics as a member of the Reform Democratic Club.

I want to congratulate Murray and Beatrice on their 50 years of marriage and their children, Judith, Hal, Aron, Sari, and Debra.

CASEWORK

HON. LEE H. HAMILTON

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, July 24, 1996

Mr. HAMILTON. Mr. Speaker, I would like to insert my Washington Report for Wednesday, July 24, 1996, into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD:

HELPING HOOSIERS WITH CASEWORK

A large part of my work involves helping Hoosiers who are caught up in federal red tape or who feel lost in trying to deal with the government bureaucracy. Although not the kind of thing that gets a lot of public attention, working daily to help individual Hoosiers is one of my most important roles as a Member of Congress.

BACKGROUND

Individuals contact my office looking for a wide range of assistance. Sometimes it is an older person whose Medicare claim was incorrectly denied, a farmer who needs help with a government loan, a family that has not received its tax refund, or someone travelling abroad who needs an emergency passport. Other times it could be someone with a specific question, but just doesn't know where to go or whom to contact.

The variety of individual casework can be enormous. In recent weeks I have worked on everything from getting stalled benefit checks started for recent retirees to helping needy people get into affordable housing to getting assistance for dislocated defense workers. My most frequent contacts are to Medicare, Social Security, Veterans Affairs, the military, and the IRS. Sometimes I contact state agencies, for example, when helping a local family receive child support from a father who has left the state.

Many of my efforts also involve helping local businesses. I recently assisted a local doctor who couldn't get payment from Medicare for services he provided in 1992, a medical center whose reimbursement for care was being held up because the federal agency was

misreading the regulations, and businesses prevented by bureaucratic roadblocks from getting start-up funds and needed permits to be able to sell their products. At times I may even need to contact foreign governments, recently helping a local company receive payments for business it did with India.

My office also assist 9th District communities in a variety of ways—from getting assistance for communities damaged by natural disasters to cutting through red tape in redevelopment of closed military bases, such as Jefferson Proving Ground. Often communities have applied for federal grants, which my office can help move along. For example, I helped a local community get a small business revolving loan fund that a federal agency incorrectly thought should be taken away, and recently stepped in when a government agency simply lost a local application for community development assistance. Since the beginning of last year I have supported more than 100 projects bringing in over \$62 million to the District. My office frequently checks with local government officials, asking if they are experiencing difficulties with Washington.

THE PROCESS

Requests for casework come by letter, phone, and personal contracts. After someone signs a consent form allowing me to review their file and contact a federal agency on their behalf, my office will then contact the relevant agency to ask that the constituent's problems be given full, prompt, and fair considerations. After the agency has acted on the request, the constituent is informed about the outcome. Most of the casework my office handles is resolved favorably, but if a particular case is not, the constituent is usually given information about appeal rights or any alternative opportunities for assistance.

Each week my office receives some 80 new requests for help. Some may be resolved quickly, while others involving benefit claims can take longer. At any one time my office may have up to 400 cases pending with federal agencies and departments.

LIMITATIONS

Various limitations are placed on what Members of Congress can do on behalf of constituents. Federal law prohibits Members from accepting compensation for government services, and there are restrictions on contacts in formal agency proceedings that resemble court proceedings. But Members can contact agencies and departments about normal regulatory proceedings, such as when a department issues regulations on a new law. On typical contacts by Members on behalf of their constituents, federal law and the courts have generally granted Members broad leeway, based in large part on the view that allowing Congress to communicate as freely as possible is essential to oversight of the unelected bureaucracy.

Congressional ethics guidelines recommend that Members not exert "undue influence" upon an agency through threats or promises of rewards. But arguing a matter on the merits, expressing an opinion on an agency matter, or asking for reconsideration of a past decision all have been considered permissible conduct by Members.

My view is that Members should not be trying to secure benefits for their constituents that they don't deserve. The main emphasis should be on providing information and facilitating communication between constituents and the bureaucracy. Constituents should receive exactly what they deserve under law—no more and no less.

IMPORTANCE

Casework is important, first, because people need help dealing with the large government bureaucracy. The ways the government