

Our young people are flying out of Aviano tonight, this day, this hour. I hope the message that we send to them is not as a divided House or Nation but as a Nation that sees its duty and responsibility as the leader of the free world and, when it comes to the water's edge, can unite to stand for principle and for our alliance and for freedom.

□ 2030

U.S.-CUBAN BASEBALL GAME IS PROPAGANDA BONANZA FOR CASTRO

(Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, this Monday the latest U.S. concession to the Castro dictatorship will take place just a few miles from the Capitol when the Baltimore Orioles will play the Cuban national team.

This event is nothing but a propaganda bonanza for Castro as it helps the dictatorship divert attention from the repression that continues on the island.

For every pitch thrown in the game, one more person in Cuba will be fearing that one of Castro's thugs could come knock on his door and arbitrarily arrest him.

For every hit, one more political prisoner in Cuba will be hungry and needing the medical attention that the regime denies him.

For every inning that goes by, one more dissident will be harassed for speaking merely about bringing freedom to the enslaved island of Cuba.

And let us not fool ourselves. Playing ball with Castro will do nothing to help the Cuban people achieve their long-sought freedom.

Just last Friday, the United Nations Human Rights Commission condemned the atrocities of the Castro tyranny. Yet on Monday we will play ball with that same dictatorship.

We must stop rewarding the Castro tyranny while the regime continues its brutal repression on the people of Cuba, who desire to live in freedom.

DEPLOYMENT OF TROOPS FROM MOODY AIR FORCE BASE, VALDOSTA, GEORGIA

(Mr. BISHOP asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. BISHOP. Mr. Speaker, about 100 members of the 41st Rescue Squadron are scheduled to leave by tomorrow to be deployed in the NATO operation to bring peace and stability to Kosovo. While all of us who serve in this body consider it a very personal matter whenever our troops are sent into harm's way, this is especially the case when they are in our own hometowns.

These troops are from Moody Air Force Base in Valdosta, Georgia, lo-

cated in Georgia's Second Congressional District. They carry out combat search-and-rescue missions, a highly skilled and dangerous job, yet very vital to these operations.

As they embark upon this mission, I know all of my colleagues join with me in wishing them godspeed and a safe return. My prayers go out to all of the deployed men and women and their families for a speedy return.

God bless NATO. God bless our troops and their families. God bless the people of Kosovo. And God bless America.

ON KOSOVO: BIPARTISAN VOTE IN HOUSE

(Mr. OSE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. OSE. Mr. Speaker, my colleagues, I have been a Member of this House for 14 weeks, as I shared earlier today, and I have to tell my colleagues, my pride in serving here and the honor that I share in being here multiplied at least three orders of magnitude today.

I am a thousand times more proud today of the action of this House in exercising its constitutional authority as one of the legs of this government in specifying its concerns from both sides of the aisle as to the action we have been undertaking in Kosovo.

I want to note for the record that in fact this was a bipartisan vote on both sides of the question. There were more Republicans voting in favor of continuing the President's action in Kosovo than there were Democrats voting against it. But, in fact, there were Members on both sides of the question, from both sides of the aisle.

This is a strength of America. It is the thing we have that no one else in this world does. It is something to be proud of rather than question. And I am still honored to be here.

God bless the United States of America.

TODAY IS A DAY WHICH HOUSE WILL PROFOUNDLY REGRET

(Mr. OBEY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, I disagree with virtually every word uttered by the previous speaker. The previous vote, in my view, represents an appalling lack of judgment, an appalling lack of will, an appalling lack of leadership, an appalling lack of vision, an appalling abandonment of the national interest, an appalling abandonment of the troops in the field, an appalling lack of bipartisanship.

It is a day which this House will profoundly regret.

IN SUPPORT OF U.S. TROOPS IN KOSOVO

(Mr. SCARBOROUGH asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. SCARBOROUGH. Mr. Speaker, it is so easy for other people to come up and say we should stifle our voices and not speak our minds, when people in my district from five military bases in my district are the ones that will be dying over there.

The very children of those troops that will be dying are the ones that go to public school with my children. The wives and husbands of the troops that will be dying are the ones that go to church with me every week. The ones that will be dying over there are the ones that I see every day in and out, five military bases, probably more active duty people in my district than anybody.

So let us not get up here and be self-righteous and talk about how we do not support the troops. This is about supporting the troops. If we think the President's policy is wrong-headed, do not tell me we do not have the right to come to this floor and talk about our concerns.

We have grave concerns. We need to sit back and look at the policy, refocus, and decide what is best not only for the world, not only for this country, but for the troops that we are sending in harm's way.

U.S. AND NATO WILL PREVAIL IN KOSOVO

(Mr. KIND asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. KIND. Mr. Speaker, I am just in my second term here in the United States and I have to state that tonight I have never been more embarrassed to be a Member of this institution based on the vote that we just cast a few minutes ago.

Has partisan politics so permeated this culture that we cannot see the long-term vision of what is happening in Europe? Milosevic is the only surviving tyrant left on the continent. He is surrounded by democracies.

Who amongst us 10 years ago could have predicted that some of the most repressive Communist regimes in central Europe would be flourishing democracies and members of the European Union and NATO today?

That is the inevitable course of events in Europe. And we have a role. Peace and humanity will prevail in Kosovo. The refugees will go home. They will have security. They will have self-autonomy.

And, Mr. Milosevic, make no mistake about this vote tonight, that is not negotiable; the U.S. and NATO will prevail, or God help us all.

CONGRESS IS SENDING WRONG MESSAGE TO U.S. TROOPS IN KOSOVO

(Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I do not know what we wrought just a few minutes ago. And it is interesting to listen to my colleagues talk about defending the troops and saving lives. But if they would have read the resolution that we had before us just a few minutes ago, although I am not challenging the conscience of those who express themselves, this is where we should do it. That is why we have a democracy.

But it is interesting, Mr. Speaker, that just a few minutes ago we voted not to support those troops who have their lives on the line, who engage in the military air strikes, just as our Senate colleagues voted a couple of weeks ago to say we support their efforts in bringing about peace, in bringing about a resolution in fighting for the refugees.

I am not sure what we thought we were doing, but the message that goes out to those who have to leave right now and engage in war and conflict on behalf of the freedom of those of us here in the United States and of those refugees being murdered and raped is that we are not in support of their efforts.

I hope that we will not say to the POWs we do not want them home. I hope that we will correct this mistake that we have made. But most of all, I hope the clear message will be that we, as Americans, stand united behind freedom, behind justice, and behind the safe return of the refugees and the POWs.

PRESIDENT NEEDS TO CONSULT CONGRESS AND AMERICAN PEOPLE WHEN SENDING TROOPS TO WAR

(Mrs. FOWLER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. FOWLER. Mr. Speaker, I just want to address the House in relation to some of the comments that my colleagues have just made.

This has been a very serious day today. We have had some serious debate. Some people really have really been struggling with their consciences and their decisions because we have been talking about young Americans' lives, because we have young American lives at risk today. There are young men and women from my district that are flying over Yugoslavia tonight, dropping some of those bombs.

The message that I think was sent today was twofold. One was to the President of the United States, that whenever he is going to send our young people into harm's way, he needs to come to this Congress, he needs to consult with the Congress, and he needs to go to the American people.

This is not a unilateral decision that should be made by the President. He needs to come to the Congress, the representatives of the people. This is not about whether we support the troops or

not. We all support our troops, and we are going to give them every resource they need. But the President of the United States needs to come to this Congress.

And second is that we do have a democracy that works. Our forefathers were so wise because this is an institution that works. And while we disagree and sometimes we like the way the vote comes out and sometimes we do not, the institution of our government works and it will continue to work for as long as this country lasts.

CONGRESS SUPPORTS AIR WAR IN KOSOVO

(Mr. SHERMAN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SHERMAN. Mr. Speaker, this has been a momentous day. And it is important that the Nation, and especially the leaders in Belgrade, do not misinterpret what happened here.

America will continue the air war, and that air war has the support of this House. America demands the resettlement of the Kosovars in safety in Kosovo, and that has overwhelming support. And that is all indicated by our rejection of the resolution to withdraw all military efforts from the Yugoslav theater.

We also voted clearly, and the White House should not misconstrue this, that before massive ground forces are deployed, Congress must be consulted.

And finally, in what I fear will be a confusing vote, and I use this speech to avoid such confusion, we voted 213-213 on a resolution that seemed restricted to the air war, but those who understand our legal system will recognize that the reason we voted that way was to make sure our own courts did not misinterpret that vote as a vote in favor of a carte blanche to the President. We support the air war by a large vote in this House.

SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. WAMP). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, and under a previous order of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

BLIND EMPOWERMENT ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. EHRLICH) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. EHRLICH. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce the Blind Empowerment Act, which will impact the lives of nearly a quarter of a million blind people.

The Blind Empowerment Act, Mr. Speaker, restores the long-standing linkage between blind people and senior citizens under the Social Security

Act. This bipartisan legislation, which currently has over 230 cosponsors, will restore this historic link and empower blind people.

For nearly 20 years, the blind and senior citizens were linked for purposes of the Social Security earnings test. Generally, the test has been a part of our Social Security program since its inception. The test reduces the benefits of recipients who earn above a certain amount of income from their work.

In 1977, the Social Security amendments established the earnings limit for the blind who receive disability benefits. This exempt amount was linked to the identical exempt amount as applied to seniors 65 and over.

In 1996, we did the right thing by raising the earnings limit for seniors from \$11,500 to \$30,000 by the year 2002. That was the Senior Citizens Freedom To Work Act. Giving seniors the opportunity to increase their earnings and keep their benefits was the right thing to do.

During the process, however, this historic link between the blind and the seniors was ended, which aided in balancing the budget. As a result, by 2002, when the exemption for seniors becomes \$30,000, the lower limit set by Congress for the blind will be half that amount.

It is also important to note that when blind individuals earn more than the earnings limit threshold, they lose all of their benefits. The senior citizens in the same situation would only have their benefits reduced by a rate of \$1 for every \$3 earned over the limit.

We should not roll back the progress of the last 2 decades by continuing a policy which discourages working individuals from becoming self-sufficient and making a contribution to their communities.

It is my belief that "delinkage" occurred because our priorities in 1995 were to rein in deficit spending and not to provide a disincentive to the working blind. The blind want to work and take pride in doing so.

In an era of budget surplus, need for capable workers in a tight labor market, and a clear opportunity to demonstrate fairness and equity, it is time for Congress to restore this historic link. The increasing number of working blind Americans will produce additional tax revenue and contributions to the Federal Treasury and the Social Security Trust Fund.

Approximately 70 percent of working-age blind people are underemployed or unemployed. Accordingly, blindness is often associated with adverse social and economic consequences. It is difficult for blind individuals to find sustained employment or, for that matter, employment at all.

□ 2045

This is especially good, common-sense legislation during this favorable economic time. When I listen to business owners back in my district, one thing they tell me is that their priority is to find and keep quality workers.