

For nearly 5 years, I have been asking my colleagues to join me in protesting her conviction. I have circulated three letters to the President over the years, and each letter has been signed by more and more Members of Congress in support of Lori. In August, 221 Members of Congress, in a bipartisan way, signed a letter calling for Lori's release.

I will be circulating a new letter asking for mercy for Lori, asking for Peru to act with compassion and send Lori home on humanitarian grounds.

Since her conviction, Lori's health has deteriorated. She was originally sent to Yanomayo Prison, located high in the Andes, over 12,000 feet above sea level. The altitude destroyed her health. People like Lori who have not grown up in the Andes cannot acclimate to the high altitude of Yanomayo.

I visited with Lori in October of 1997. When I saw her, her fingers were swollen and she had circulatory problems as a result of the high altitude. Very little natural light comes into the prison, and prisoners are allowed only 1 hour a day to exercise outside. As a result, Lori's eye sight was failing. Yanomayo was not heated, and the temperature rarely rises above 40 degrees. The cold gave Lori perpetual laryngitis.

Eventually, the Peruvian officials responded to pleas to move Lori. But in some ways, she faced an even harder challenge to her health. The new prison was more than 5,000 feet above sea level, better than the former prison, but still hard for a New Yorker. The altitude, while less dangerous to her health, continued to affect her circulatory system.

The toughest part was that she was forced to spend months completely alone. For more than 100 days, Lori was kept in solitary confinement. The isolation had an extremely negative effect on her psychological well-being.

Despite the difficult circumstances, Lori has always been quiet, polite, and well behaved, a model prisoner. I am hopeful that Peru will take these circumstances into account and act with mercy and compassion.

I returned to Peru in April of 1998 and, together with the gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN), met with President Fujimori. He was very open during our meeting and agreed to take another look at Lori's case if new evidence was presented. Apparently, Peru has uncovered new evidence, and Lori is getting a new trial in a civilian court.

Since Lori was arrested, her parents, Mark and Rhoda Berenson, have worked every day tirelessly for her release. They know Lori as a young idealist who traveled to Peru as a journalist. University professors who live in my district, the Berensons have given up their careers to devote themselves to trying to free their daughter and bring her home. They welcome the news that Lori's conviction has been

overturned, but they worry that political pressures will ensure that she will receive a long sentence in a civilian trial.

In Peru, it is a crime to express sympathy for the MRTA, the crime is apologetics. In the United States, it would be protected as free speech. There it can carry a long prison sentence.

I hope that Peru can be persuaded to act with mercy. There is nothing to be gained by keeping Lori in prison any longer. Peru has already admitted that Lori was not the terrorist leader she was originally convicted of being.

I wrote to President Fujimori yesterday to let him know how pleased I am that Lori will have a civilian trial. President Fujimori has taken a brave step that has subjected him to enormous criticism at home. I am pleased that he recognized that the evidence showed that Lori did not belong in Peru's military courts.

Now it is time for Peru to take the next step and release Lori. Lori will not be getting off lightly if she is released now. She has spent nearly 5 years in prison in conditions that have seriously undermined her health. I hope that whatever the outcome of her trial, Lori's ordeal will soon be over. For humanitarian reasons, for the sake of compassion, and for her health, I hope Lori will be allowed to come home.

Mr. Speaker, I include my letter to President Fujimori for the RECORD as follows:

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, DC, September 5, 2000.

President ALBERTO FUJIMORI,
Palacio de Gobierno, Plaza de Armas S/N, Lima
1 Peru.

DEAR PRESIDENT FUJIMORI: I am pleased to learn that Lori Berenson's conviction has been overturned by Peru's military tribunal. As you know from our conversation when we met in April 1998, Lori Berenson is a constituent of mine and I am deeply concerned about her. I appreciated your willingness and that of members of your government to discuss her case with me during those visits.

The tribunal's decision is a tremendous step forward for human rights in Peru. I applaud the members of the tribunal for looking at new evidence in this case and concluding that the new evidence did not support the original verdict.

In October 1997, I visited Lori in prison and I found her spirits to be good despite her deteriorating health. Like many people who are unaccustomed to high altitudes, Lori could not acclimate to living at Yanomayo prison. The high altitude played havoc with her health. When I saw her, her fingers were swollen, her eyesight was failing, and she was having circulatory problems and perpetual laryngitis. After she was moved to a prison at a lower altitude, she spent more than 100 days in solitary confinement. Despite the severe privation, she has always been quiet, polite and well-behaved—a model prisoner.

I am grateful that she will have a civilian trial. However, after nearly five years in prison, Lori has already undergone severe punishment and I hope, whatever the outcome of her trial, her ordeal will soon be over. For humanitarian reasons, for the sake

of compassion and for her health, I hope Lori will soon be allowed to come home.

Sincerely,

CAROLYN B. MALONEY,
Member of Congress.

MINDING OUR OWN BUSINESS REGARDING COLOMBIA IS IN THE BEST INTEREST OF AMERICA

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

Mr. PAUL. Mr. Speaker, those of us who warned of the shortcomings of expanding our military presence in Colombia were ignored when funds were appropriated for this purpose earlier this year. We argued at that time that clearly no national security interests were involved; that the Civil War was more than 30 years old, complex with three factions fighting, and no assurance as to who the good guys were; that the drug war was a subterfuge, only an excuse, not a reason, to needlessly expand our involvement in Colombia; and that special interests were really driving our policy: Colombia Oil Reserves owned by American interests, American weapons manufacturers, and American corporations anxious to build infrastructure in Colombia.

Already our foolish expanded pressure in Colombia has had a perverse effect. The stated purpose of promoting peace and stability has been undermined. Violence has worsened as factions are now fighting more fiercely than ever before for territory as they anticipate the full force of U.S. weapons arriving.

The already weak peace process has been essentially abandoned. Hatred toward Americans by many Colombians has grown. The Presidents of 12 South American countries rejected outright the American-backed military operation amendment aimed at the revolutionary groups in Colombia.

This foolhardy effort to settle the Colombian civil war has clearly turned out to be a diplomatic failure. The best evidence of a seriously flawed policy is the departure of capital. Watching money flows gives us a market assessment of policy; and by all indication, our policy spells trouble.

There is evidence of a recent large-scale exodus of wealthy Colombians to Miami. Tens of thousands of Colombians are leaving for the U.S., Canada, Costa Rica, Spain, Australia. These are the middle-class and upper-class citizens, taking their money with them. Our enhanced presence in Colombia has accelerated this exodus.

Our policy, unless quickly and thoroughly reversed, will surely force an escalation of the civil war and a dangerous increase in our involvement with both dollars and troops. All this will further heighten the need for drug sales to finance all factions of the civil war. So much for stopping the drug war.

Our policy is doomed to fail. There is no national security interest involved;

therefore, no goals can be set and no victory achievable. A foreign policy of non-intervention designed only to protect our sovereignty with an eagerness to trade with all nations willing to be friends is the traditional American foreign policy and would give us the guaranteed hope of peace, the greatest hope of peace and prosperity.

Let us think seriously about our foreign policy, and hopefully someday we will pursue a policy in the best interest of America by minding our own business.

HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

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

Mr. BACA. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to bring about the awareness of Hispanic Heritage Month, which begins September 15 and continues through October 5.

Today, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, more than 29 million people of the United States are of Hispanic origin. This is about 10 percent of the country. Close to half of those reside in California. More than 600,000 reside in my district of San Bernardino County.

Why, just the other day, the Los Angeles Times was discussing the fact that, in California, Hispanics are no longer the minority. That is why this coming month is a time for all Latinos to be able to recognize the great accomplishments by the people here in the States as well as around the world.

We recognize the great achievements of people like Cesar Chavez who led the fight for the protection of farm workers' health and health rights; Bishop Barnes, who represents San Bernardino Riverside Catholic Diocese; Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, who wrote about the great Don Quixote; and people like Andres Segovia, Tito Peuntes, and Julio Iglesias, who were and still are some of the best Spanish musicians in the world.

The teachings and contributions of Hispanics like these, and learning about the cultures from which they come, are how we are able to continue our tradition through our youth.

In many of our classrooms around the country, teachers will hold activities and discussions that will focus on what our ancestors have accomplished. That is why they will learn the great accomplishment of the Spanish explorers as well as those who first settled in States like California and Texas.

□ 1915

This is why cities like Los Angeles, San Bernardino, San Antonio, amongst many other cities, have Hispanic names. Such teachings and discussions will not only educate our children, but also provide them with the proper role models needed to succeed. It also lets them know that they too can accomplish higher dreams; Hispanics in positions, in leadership positions throughout the United States.

We now see that Hispanic Heritage Month is not just about celebration, but it is about uniting our community to better educate our children and to educate ourselves about what it means to be a Hispanic. It means being proud of who we are. It does not matter if we are Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Spanish, or Central American. This is a time we all continue to celebrate our cultures as a whole.

And what a culture we have. The number of Hispanic-owned businesses in the United States increased by 76 percent between 1986 and 1992 and continues to grow daily. Across America we find more and more Hispanic businesses growing and more and more Hispanic business owners, business owners like Richard Romero out of my district who owned quite a few car dealerships, who just recently passed away.

We have more representatives in government now than we have ever had in the history of this country and of our people. Each year, from now until the year 2050, the Hispanic population is projected to add more to people in the United States than any other race or ethnic group, and we are soon to become the largest minority in the country. But even with the success, we still have problems. We lack full health care benefits for all people. There are still problems with immigrant laws that were written in haste and do not protect the people they were originally written for. High school dropout rates and teen pregnancy numbers are too high. We must address these issues if we plan to build a better culture and a better country for all people of America.

And speaking of education, we have to address the issues of bilingual education and the digital divide. And that does not just apply to Spanish children, it applies to all children. We have to begin by providing our youth with the tools necessary to succeed. We can begin to provide these tools right here in Congress.

By understanding each other's culture we can understand what is needed for everyone and we learn to respect one another. And respect is what we all ask for. That is why it is so important for this Congress to recognize this month and to take time to learn about a great culture with a great future, that is each other's culture and the Hispanic culture this month.

Before I go on, I also want to recognize September 16, Mexico Independence Day. I want to recognize the hardship that the people have had to face in order to achieve their independence. Like this country, they too believe in the freedom of choice and independence from tyrannical government. Only through a better understanding can we achieve our goals, a united country working for the betterment of ourselves, and not only where we come from but where we are going. Together, united, our country will be a lot better.

REPORT ON RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 4115, UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

Mr. REYNOLDS, from the Committee on Rules, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 106-822) on the resolution (H. Res. 570) providing for consideration of the bill (H.R. 4115) to authorize appropriations for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and for other purposes, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

TRIBUTE TO FIREFIGHTERS

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

Mr. SIMPSON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to thank the men and women who have been selflessly fighting fires throughout the western United States this summer. Unfortunately, I have the distinction of representing the district that has, what I am told, the largest fire and the most acres burned in the United States. The Clear Creek fire alone covers an area of over 200,000 acres, outside of Salmon, Idaho, an area one-third the size of the State of Rhode Island. It is but one of many that have been burning throughout Idaho and the western United States.

I was fortunate that I was able to spend 2 days on the fire lines and in the camps with the men and women who have been heroically fighting these catastrophic fire. I saw firefighters on the line in the smoke and ash. I met with support crews in the camps who cook, provide firefighting supplies and equipment, make maps all night long in preparation for morning briefings, and the men who run the showers so that the firefighters can have a basic semblance of normalcy, a hot shower after 16 hours on the fire line. That is what it comes down to for front-line firefighters, food, a hot shower, and, if they are lucky, a little sleep.

Many of the firefighters and support personnel are wives and husbands who have left their families in other areas of the country for weeks at a time. I met one woman from Missouri who worked at a Forest Service district office there. She was running the commissary. It is the people on the front lines and behind the scenes working together that help to contain these wild fires, with some help from Mother Nature. Without their dedication, perseverance, and individual sacrifices, many more lives, structures, and wildlife habitat would have been lost. Their commitment and dedication is unsurpassed, and they are the best in the world.

Spending a couple of days in the fire camps and on the lines, I picked up a few things from the people who are at the ground level. One is obvious, and we have been discussing it for years.