

Mr. OXLEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my support for H.R. 27, the Small Public Housing Authority Act. This bill will be considered under the suspension of the rules. This legislation, which addresses the annual plan requirement for small public housing authorities (PHAs), passed the House Financial Services Committee by a unanimous bipartisan voice vote on March 17, 2004.

First, I would like to thank the distinguished gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BEREUTER), the author of this legislation, for his efforts in attempting to reduce the regulatory burdens that small PHAs face. I would also like to thank the distinguished gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. FRANK), the Chairman of the Subcommittee for Housing and Community Opportunity, Mr. BOB NEY, and the ranking member, Ms. MAXINE WATERS, for their support of H.R. 27.

This legislation would exempt small PHAs from being required to submit an annual plan to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Under current law, PHAs are required to submit both a 5-year plan and an annual plan to HUD. This legislation is needed to provide some regulatory relief to small PHAs who do not have the resources or time to do these HUD annual plans by themselves. Currently, small PHAs are having to hire expensive third parties to complete these annual plans. Furthermore, an indirect result of this bill would give executive directors of these small PHAs more time to focus on the important needs of their tenants.

The exemption of these smaller PHAs will not have an adverse impact on the ability of tenant organizations to continue to have input with the manager's of their developments. Language was incorporated into the legislation to ensure tenant's participation. Additionally, I want to assure my colleagues that this legislation will still require smaller PHAs to provide the forward-type thinking and advance planning as required under the 5-year plans.

The larger question, however, raised by this legislation is whether the planning requirements for smaller and larger PHAs alike can be a useful tool. It appears that the jury is still out on that question and the Committee will review the issue to determine how we can provide as much flexibility to the Public Housing Authorities, decrease unnecessary regulatory burdens as well as ensure that tenants have a stake in the communities where they live.

In conclusion, I want to urge your support for H.R. 27. This bipartisan bill contains important provisions to reduce the regulatory burdens on small PHAs.

Ms. WATERS. Mr. Speaker, I urge an aye vote on the bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BEREUTER. Mr. Speaker, I urge an aye vote, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CHOCOLA). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BEREUTER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 27, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

□ 1745

EXPRESSING SENSE OF HOUSE REGARDING NEED FOR FREEDOM AND DEMOCRATIC REFORM IN LAOS

Mr. BURTON of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 402) expressing the sense of the House of Representatives regarding the urgent need for freedom, democratic reform, and international monitoring of elections, human rights and religious liberty in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. RES. 402

Whereas, in 1975, the Kingdom of Laos, a constitutional monarchy and important ally of the United States during the Vietnam War, was overthrown by the Marxist Lao People's Revolutionary Party with the assistance of the People's Army of North Vietnam;

Whereas the Lao People's Democratic Republic was established as a one-party regime in 1975 following the communist takeover;

Whereas tens of thousands of Laotian and Hmong people, a prominent highland minority group, were killed or died at the hands of communist forces while attempting to flee the Lao communist regime, and many others perished in reeducation and labor camps;

Whereas tens of thousands of Laotian and Hmong became refugees, eventually resettling in the United States where they now reside as American citizens and lead constructive lives as members of their communities;

Whereas the only political party allowed by law in Laos is the communist Lao People's Revolutionary Party;

Whereas, in 1989, Laos held its first elections since the establishment of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, but only candidates who were approved by the communist Lao People's Revolutionary Party were allowed to seek public office;

Whereas, in 1991, Laos adopted its first constitution which purports to guarantee the people of Laos a wide range of freedoms, including the freedoms of speech, assembly, and religion;

Whereas the Lao People's Revolutionary Party Congress meets every five years and controls or influences the organs of the state in Laos, including the armed forces, the security services, and the National Assembly;

Whereas the Lao People's Revolutionary Party promulgates the five-year state plans that control the economy and do not need to receive the approval of the National Assembly;

Whereas, in 1999, peaceful pro-democracy demonstrations held by Laotian students in the capital of Vientiane calling for political and economic reforms were suppressed by force by the Lao government, which arrested many of the students;

Whereas Amnesty International reports that many Laotian student leaders from the 1999 pro-democracy demonstrations continue to be held by the Lao government and languish in the Lao prison system or remain unaccounted for;

Whereas, in 2001, Olivier Dupuis, a Member of the European Parliament, was arrested and jailed in Laos along with a group of pro-democracy activists after peacefully protesting for the release of the Lao students and for democratic and human rights reforms in Laos;

Whereas international election monitors are currently not permitted to enter Laos to monitor elections;

Whereas Laos remains a one-party communist state that continues to prohibit the organizing of opposition political parties to the Lao People's Revolutionary Party;

Whereas, in 2002, elections for the Lao People's Democratic National Assembly were held nearly a year earlier than scheduled and excluded all candidates from political parties other than the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, as well as all overseas Laotians;

Whereas Amnesty International and other independent human rights organizations are not permitted to enter Laos to monitor or investigate the human rights situation or reports of alleged human rights violations;

Whereas, in 2003, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom issued a country report on religious persecution in Laos, recommending that the President designate Laos as a "country of particular concern";

Whereas the Department of State reported in its most recent Country Report on Human Rights Practices in Laos that Laos restricts its citizens from enjoying the freedoms of speech, assembly, and religion, and from undertaking activities to change their government;

Whereas, in 2003, the United Nations Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination stated that the Lao government had failed to honor its obligations, and the Committee expressed its grave concerns at the information it had received of serious and repeated human rights violations in Laos;

Whereas, in October 2003, Amnesty International issued a statement detailing its concern about the use of starvation by the Lao government as a weapon of war against civilians in Laos and the deteriorating situation facing thousands of family members of ethnic minority groups, predominantly the Hmong;

Whereas, in 2003, Amnesty International's International Secretariat, in a statement further detailing its concerns about Laos, condemned in the strongest terms the use of starvation as a weapon of war against civilians and cited it as a clear and serious violation of the Geneva Conventions that Laos has ratified;

Whereas because many Laotians and Hmong, including those in the overseas communities, are not members of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, they do not meet with its approval as political candidates, but they are nevertheless successful businessmen, technocrats, and community and religious leaders with democratic aspirations and concern for the people of Laos; and

Whereas the United States has a vital interest in the worldwide promotion of democratic principles and respect for human rights, and supports democratic reforms in Laos: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives strongly supports the following points and urges the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the United Nations, the European Union, and the Association of South East Asian Nations—

(1) to work to provide unrestricted access to Laos by international election monitors for upcoming presidential and National Assembly elections;

(2) to work to provide unrestricted access to Laos, including special closed military zones and closed provinces, by international human rights organizations, the United Nations, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, and humanitarian aid organizations;

(3) to work to ensure that opposition political parties and their candidates are allowed to run for public office in multi-party elections without regard to gender, race, ethnicity, religion, economic standing, or political affiliation, and that all adult citizens of

Laos, including overseas Laotian citizens, are permitted to vote and run for public office;

(4) to allow the citizens of Laos to assemble and peacefully protest against the Government of Laos, the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, and individual public officials, and to freely organize opposition groups and independent political parties;

(5) to heed the call by the United Nations Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination for the Lao People's Revolutionary Party to halt immediately all acts of violence against the Hmong population and provide them with humanitarian assistance;

(6) to work to gain the immediate release of those students and their family members arrested and jailed in connection with the 1999 pro-democracy demonstrations, as well as all other political prisoners, prisoners of conscience, and those jailed for their religious beliefs or ethnicity; and

(7) to work to implement the recommendations of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom with respect to promoting religious freedom in Laos.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CHOCOLA). Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) and the gentleman from California (Mr. LANTOS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BURTON of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the resolution under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Indiana?

There was no objection.

Mr. BURTON of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

As the sponsor of H. Res. 402, this resolution which expresses the strong sense of the House in support of election monitors, human rights and religious liberty in Laos is a very important piece of legislation. Since the 1975 overthrow of the Lao monarchy, Laos has been a one-party, Communist state in which the Lao People's Revolutionary Party is the only party allowed by law; and the repression there, Mr. Speaker, is unbelievable.

Although the 1991 Lao Constitution claimed to guarantee a wide range of freedoms, peaceful pro-democracy demonstrations in 1999 were forcibly suppressed. Many of those demonstrators remain in prison. The government of Laos continues to restrict basic freedoms and has been credibly accused of using starvation against civilians and of continuing its persecution of the courageous Hmong ethnic minority.

I sincerely appreciate and support the Hmong people in their fight for freedom and democracy. They and the entire Laotian people deserve our complete support and assistance. We must address the current human rights situation while pressing for real progress in Laos.

H. Res. 402 urges the Lao Government and international bodies to work to-

ward access for international election and human rights monitors, genuine multiparty democracy, and the halt of violence against the Hmong, also the release of political and religious prisoners and the promotion of religious freedom throughout Laos.

These are worthy goals. I urge the Communist government in Laos to change their attitude toward these people. I urge all of my colleagues here in this body to support this resolution.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume. I rise in strong support of this resolution, and I urge my colleagues to do so as well.

First, I want to commend my good friend from Indiana, my distinguished colleague, for introducing this resolution; and I want to commend the gentlewoman from Minnesota (Ms. MCCOLLUM), the distinguished member of the Committee on International Relations, for her strong leadership on all matters related to Laos. We greatly appreciate her hard work on this long neglected region of the world.

Mr. Speaker, the bilateral relationship between the United States and Laos has been frozen in time since the end of the Vietnam War. While we have maintained a diplomatic mission in Laos, our bilateral contacts have been infrequent and low-level. Over the past few years, both the United States and Laos have made significant efforts to improve the quality of our bilateral relationship. Given the increasingly large number of Laotian and Hmong Americans in the United States, a warming in the relationship is long overdue. The President may soon, in fact, propose the granting of normal trade relations status to Laos.

As our relations with Laos become increasingly complex, the United States must not forget the ongoing deprivation of internationally recognized human rights in Laos as well as the totalitarian nature of the ruling regime. The promotion of human rights and religious and political freedom must always remain at the core of our agenda with Laos until the Laotian people can freely choose their own government, enjoy true political freedom, and freedom of worship as they wish.

Our resolution calls attention to the negative human rights situation in Laos and urges the United States, the European Union, the United Nations, and ASEAN nations to work for positive change in Laos. The Laotian Government continues to imprison brave young people who had the courage to publicly demonstrate for political change in 1999, and some local Laotian officials continue to harass Laotians of the Christian persuasion. The Laotian Government also does not allow free and fair elections, and it prohibits any organized political opposition.

Mr. Speaker, political and social change will come to Laos, and it is my hope that the United States and our al-

lies will make every effort to ensure that these fundamental reforms come sooner rather than later.

I strongly support passage of this resolution and urge all of my colleagues to do so as well.

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to yield 4 minutes to the distinguished gentlewoman from Minnesota (Ms. MCCOLLUM).

Ms. MCCOLLUM. I thank the gentleman from California (Mr. LANTOS) for his kind words.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of this resolution, urging improved human rights, democratic reform and religious freedom in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the U.S. Ambassador in Laos, Douglas Hartwick, and his hardworking, dedicated staff at our embassy in Vientiane for their commitment toward human rights and reform in Laos.

Mr. Speaker, most Americans do not know very much about the country of Laos, but many people in my congressional district know this country very well. Minnesota is home to over 53,000 Hmong and Lao Americans. I represent one of the largest Hmong constituencies in the United States. My constituents and I strongly support improving human rights and the quality of life for the people of Laos. The Lao Government has been working cooperatively with the United States on international terrorism and helping to provide a full accounting of Americans missing in action from the Vietnam War. The Lao Government has taken steps to protect religious freedom and the hundreds of Hmong and Laotians from my district who have traveled to Laos have seen some improvement; but I want to state clearly, despite these steps, greater progress is still needed on human rights, religious tolerance, democratic rule of law, and transparency.

One way the Lao Government can demonstrate their commitment to reform is by allowing international humanitarian workers the ability to monitor the Hmong amnesty and resettlement program in order to ensure that the Hmong are receiving the humanitarian assistance they need and they deserve. My constituents and I are committed to advancing these efforts in Laos. If Laos is going to truly reform into a more open and democratic society, the United States needs to play a greater role in working with the Lao people and the Lao Government.

The United States policy of economic isolation has made it very difficult for the Hmong and Laotian Americans in my district to engage in economic activity that will improve the quality of life for their relatives in Laos. This failed U.S. policy of economic isolation has lasted close to 30 years, and it has had real human consequences, as extreme poverty is a fact of life for much of the people who live in Laos. The United Nations development program ranks Laos 143rd out of 173 countries in

terms of human development. Only half the population can read, 30 percent of the people will die before they are 40 years old, and 26 percent of the population lives on less than a dollar a day. One out of every 10 children will die before they reach the age of 5. I consider this fact a human rights tragedy.

The people of Laos also endure the deadly remnants of U.S. bombing from the Vietnam War. The United States flew more than 580,000 bombing runs over Laos. More than 2 million tons of ordnance were dropped on the country of Laos, double the amount dropped on Europe during World War II. Thousands of Laotian children and adults continue to die or become maimed as a result of this unexploded American ordnance. This, too, is a human rights tragedy and was documented by The Washington Post in an article this weekend. I insert this article for the RECORD.

[From the Washington Post Foreign Service, May 1, 2004]

IN LAOS, SIFTING THE EARTH FOR AMERICAN DEAD

(By Ellen Nakashima)

SARAVAN, LAOS.— On the first day of the dig, Franklin Damann spied what appeared to be a bone fragment resting on the soil surface. But he could not be sure. He put it in a Ziploc bag labeled "Possible Osseous Remains."

He hoped that the fragment, and several more found over the next few days, would yield DNA to help identify U.S. Air Force Col. Norman Dale Eaton or his navigator, Lt. Col. Paul E. Getchell. Their B-57 exploded and crashed on a remote hill in southern Laos in 1969, at the height of the Vietnam War.

Damann, a forensic anthropologist, and about a dozen U.S. service members shoveled and sifted hundreds of buckets of dirt from that metal-pocked hill in February. In several equally isolated and treacherous sites in Cambodia and Vietnam, other teams were also scanning for every shard of steel, canvas, plastic, bone or, best of all, tooth that might help identify men who died in the Vietnam War, more than 1,800 of whom are still missing.

Since 1992, 10 times a year, the military has sent teams to the old battlegrounds of Southeast Asia to search for Vietnam combatants' remains. Two to six teams go on each trip. So far, they have accounted for 724 Americans, according to the Pentagon.

But time is running out. Witnesses are dying. Investigators are now talking to people who can remember their fathers telling them about a crash site. The most accessible areas already have been excavated, and bone disintegrates more readily in the acidic soil of Southeast Asia.

It is an arduous yet optimistic endeavor, costing \$100 million a year spread over five agencies. Though the military has long proclaimed that no man or woman shall be left behind on the battlefield—and made recovery efforts for several years after World War II and the Korean War—it took the emotional upheaval of the Vietnam War to spur the government to undertake a continuous search effort. Scientists and recovery teams have been finding and identifying remains of those killed in World War II, the Korean War and the Cold War in Africa, Europe, Asia and the Pacific.

They have identified remains of about 500 service members from World War II, Korea and the Cold War. The U.S. military esti-

mates that 88,000 service members are still missing from all wars. The effort to find them is destined to continue, officials say, as long as the United States sends its men and women into battle zones.

"I can't think of a more noble mission," said Marine Capt. William P. "Bay" Dobbins, 29, leader of a team searching for the remains of a Navy pilot downed in southern Laos. Dobbins, who served in Iraq last year, said he had been waiting for this job with the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command. "I love the idea of bringing these guys home," he said.

So it was that on a chilly morning in February, a dozen soldiers, airmen, sailors, Marines and Damann, who works at the Army's Central Identification Laboratory in Honolulu, piled into an aging Russian-made Mi-17 helicopter at the team's base camp in southern Laos. Twenty minutes later, they landed on a hill in Saravan province that was traversed by the Ho Chi Minh Trail, a network of paths used by the North Vietnamese to ferry supplies along the border with Laos into South Vietnam. The team hiked down a long, steep slope and, putting spade to soil, dug in a space roughly as long and wide as an Olympic swimming pool.

About 90 Laotian villagers, who live a day's trek away and were hired for a small daily wage, were already there. They formed a bucket brigade down the slope, men and women with high cheekbones and broad faces, wearing old jeans, Nike caps and wool head scarves.

Pairs of villagers rocked trays slung from bamboo poles, massaging red dirt through quarter-inch wire mesh. As a boombox blared a Motown mix, the American team members scanned for pieces of zipper, boot, oxygen hose—what the investigators call life support material.

The hill was not an easy one. At a 35-degree angle, it had a view at 3,700 feet of a valley below filling with deceptively fast-moving clouds. Army Sgt. Robert Bryson, in charge of team safety, warned the crew: "This site is dangerous. When the pilots say go, there's no lollygagging or we'll be here overnight."

During a mission three years ago, seven military personnel and nine Vietnamese died when their Mi-17 helicopter slammed into a fog-shrouded hill.

The site was surveyed last summer by Joan Baker, an anthropologist, who also works at the Honolulu forensics lab. She found no crash crater, leading her to conclude that the plane had exploded before it plunged. Her investigative team found hundreds of pieces of fan blades, wires and bolts strewn over more than 350 square yards. Then she saw a small metal object nestled in the roots of a tree. It was a dog tag, bearing Eaton's name. "It was pretty exciting," Baker recalled. "I couldn't believe it for a minute. I was like, 'No!'" Team members planted a yellow stake wherever they found even a jot of debris, turning the hill into a dandelion field of stakes.

Damann held up a slice of rusted metal to the gray light filtering through the trees. The words "cylinder hydraulic actuating" were still visible. The metal plate was engraved with the manufacturer's name, Glenn L. Martin Ltd., Baltimore, Md., which in the 1960s retrofitted the British-made B-57s from straight-and-level planes to dive bombers.

"We'll be pulling stuff all day," said Damann, a lanky Louisianan who analyzes skeletal remains to figure out a person's size, sex, race and other characteristics.

As it turned out, the team would not be pulling stuff all day. After lunch, the clouds rolled in, obscuring the valley below. Bryson gave the word to load up the buckets and gather the tools. "It's time to get off the hill," he said.

The son of a Vietnam Navy veteran, Bryson is a mortuary affairs specialist, or 92-Mike in Army lingo. He was on his 31st recovery mission to Southeast Asia, has worked directly with MIA families and relishes the satisfaction of delivering a memento to a wife or parent.

"There are cases where a family member said, 'He always carried a 1945 buffalo nickel,' and then you go to the site and dig and pull it out of the dirt," he said. "There are wedding rings, the crucifixes, wallets with pictures." Working one World War II case, he said, he found letters ready to be mailed home. "You bring them home to a wife or mother, and the gratitude is immense. That's pretty amazing you can do stuff like that."

UNEXPLODED ORDNANCE

Elderly locals are another source of information. Khampoy Khun, a grandfatherly man with an impish grin, was trying to clear a rice field about a decade ago when he came upon metal aircraft parts poking up from the soil. He eventually told his story to American investigators and led them to a site where a Navy pilot had plowed into a hill in April 1970.

"I would be very glad if the Americans find what they are looking for and can return the remains to the families," said Khampoy, 70, cheering on the Americans and Laotians digging, hauling and screening soil. "I think the families back home are hoping the remains will be found."

He had one request, though: that the United States do more to remove unexploded ordnance left from the war. "I am very poor," Khampoy said. "And I cannot work my rice fields with the unexploded bombs. It's all over the place."

In February, the team looking for the Navy pilot's remains unearthed a 500-pound unexploded bomb.

Between 1964 and 1973, the U.S. air campaign dropped more than 2 million tons of explosive ordnance on the hills and valleys of Laos, the world's most heavily bombed nation per capita, according to United Nations Development Program statistics. Some of the craters were as large as houses. Up to 30 percent of the ordnance, it is estimated, failed to detonate and continues to kill about 200 people, many of whom are children, each year, according to the program.

In fiscal 2003 the United States spent \$1.2 million on clearing the ordnance in Laos, about one-fourth of the total international donor aid to the effort, U.S. officials said.

After 30 days, Damann, Bryson and their team flew back to Honolulu. Another team took their place in March to continue the dig. All the evidence found is bagged and sent to the lab. There, a different set of anthropologists examines the remains and the life support material.

The lab, which is part of the U.S. Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, identifies on average two Americans a week. The best way to make an identification is to match a tooth, especially one that has had a filling or a drilling, to dental records, Thomas Holland, the lab's scientific director, explained in a telephone interview from Honolulu. "No two fillings are alike," he said. "That's really how most identifications are made."

Even as the difficulty of the missions has increased, the technology has improved, Holland said. These days, up to 70 percent of cases are identified by matching mitochondrial DNA, which is passed down through the maternal line, from remains to a relative from the same maternal line, he said. About five grams of dense bone, the type found in the arm or leg, is needed to gather enough DNA for an identification.

In the mid-1990s, the military began taking a DNA sample from all service members in case it is needed for identification.

'OFF TARGET'

On the night of Jan. 13, 1969, Eaton and Getchell took off from Phan Rang Air Base in South Vietnam. They flew west toward Laos, to drop bombs and napalm on a target along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in an effort to disrupt the enemy's supply line.

Eaton's last recorded words before the plane crashed were "Off target," according to a wartime Air Force report. A C-130 pilot who was flying nearby, directing Eaton's strike, said that his cockpit was lit up by the flash from the bomb Eaton dropped, and lit up again five seconds later by the B-57's crash, according to the report. No parachutes were seen. A two-second emergency beeper signal was heard by another aircraft in the area, but it was unclear if that was from Eaton or Getchell.

Eaton, then 43, had always said that when he went, he wanted to "go down in a ball of fire," his wife, Jeanne Eaton, now 75, recalled in a telephone interview from Alexandria. He loved to fly, loved "that wonderful, celestial feeling," she said, though he had his concerns about the war.

Eaton's oldest son, Paul Eaton, 53, is now a major general in the Army, stationed in Baghdad, the commander in charge of training the nascent postwar Iraqi army.

Gethell was 32, slender, dark-haired and a carpenter with a philosophy degree. "He was always learning and reading," and looked forward to teaching, recalled his widow, Teresa Gethell, 67.

As the years passed, the two women, who have never remarried, gradually came to terms with their husbands' deaths. For Gethell, it has been so long since her husband died, she said, that finding any remains now will not mean much. "It will just verify what I feel is already the case, that he's gone," she said from her winter home in Bradenton, Fla.

For Eaton, the search holds out hope for some peace of heart.

"The very fact that they found my husband's dog tags, at least there's a substance there, there's a reality," she said. "Hopefully, they will find some tangible evidence of him."

In March, the team that took over from Damann found more possible remains at the site. The evidence will be sent to the lab. A new team returns in June to continue the hunt.

The United States must work with the Lao Government to remove this unexploded ordnance. To address this issue, I have submitted a request to the Committee on Appropriations to expand the cleanup of unexploded ordnance in Laos. I ask my colleagues today who care so deeply about human rights in Laos to join me in this effort. Today I support this resolution because my constituents who have family members in Laos want reform now.

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to yield 3 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. KIND).

Mr. KIND. Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from California for yielding me this time and for his leadership on this issue, and I thank my colleague from Indiana for offering this resolution of which I am a proud cosponsor.

Mr. Speaker, I hope the body tomorrow when it comes up for consideration will adopt this resolution. This is a very serious matter in regard to some of the practices and the abuses I feel that are currently taking place in

Laos. The resolution is very simple, expressing the sense of the House regarding the urgent need for freedom and democratic reform and international monitoring of elections, human rights and religious liberty in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

The United States owes a debt of gratitude to the Hmong veterans and their families who served as loyal and dedicated allies during the so-called secret war in southeast Asia and the Vietnam conflict, a war that many Hmong members participated in on the side of U.S. soldiers in the jungles of southeast Asia. Between 20,000 and 30,000 Hmong lost their lives during this time and more than 100,000 Hmong were forced to either flee or live in refugee camps after the U.S. pullout in southeast Asia. Through their sacrifices, many American lives were saved, and our Nation must remain committed to recognizing their service.

Today, approximately 170,000 Hmong currently reside in the United States, including 35,000 in my home State of Wisconsin. Many of these Hmong Americans have family members still in Laos facing constant allegations of harassment, imprisonment, even kidnapping and killing of ethnic Hmong by Lao authorities. These have been brought to my attention, and these allegations have been raised in many different forums. Due to modern technology, many of these reports are coming out of Laos almost simultaneously when they are occurring through the advent of cell phones documenting the abuse and some of the atrocities being committed there.

I believe it is time for this Congress and the administration to support international observance teams to go into Laos to observe firsthand the conditions that are occurring there. We need the support from our administration and from the Congress, I think, to put pressure on the government there to accept these international teams of observers. The Lao Government has one of the most egregious human rights records in the world. The State Department's own country report on human rights practices in Laos makes clear the lack of respect for human rights demonstrated by the Lao Government.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, there are many Hmong families still in Wisconsin and throughout the country who are very concerned in regards to the conditions of their own families or relatives or friends who are still in Laos. They come to Washington from time to time. These are a proud people, many of whom have now achieved their U.S. citizenship. They are productive members of our society. Their children are in our schools, growing up to get an American education and be productive citizens in the country. But their ties back to Laos still remain very strong, and it runs very deep. I think this body, this United States Congress, owes it to them, our friends and allies and in many instances our neighbors

and citizens in our own community, to take these allegations seriously, to increase the pressure on the Lao Government to allow inspections, to allow the investigation to go forward within that country so we can document and definitively determine what the situation is inside that border. I encourage my colleagues to support the resolution. I thank my colleagues for bringing it forward this evening.

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to yield 4 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER).

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. I thank the gentleman from California for yielding me this time.

Mr. Speaker, I have just returned from several days of meetings in Vientiane and Luang Prabang not only with our own very able Ambassador Doug Hartwick but his excellent embassy staff and also with Lao Government officials and many private citizens, Americans and others, who are living and working in Laos. There is a more complex and changing pictures than the wording of this resolution portrays.

Our discussions covered a wide range of topics, including the government's deficiencies in addressing human rights and political transparency issues as detailed in H. Res. 402, and I was very clear in my conversations with the Lao leaders about the urgency of meeting international standards particularly with respect to the Hmong and other indigenous people who have been the subject of ill treatment and repression.

□ 1800

I share the concerns of the authors of this resolution that Laos, like many other countries in Southeast Asia and elsewhere, should make substantial improvements in the openness of their political and judicial processes and comply with internationally recognized human, religious, and labor rights and promote economic reforms that will raise the standard of living of its citizens through improved investment and trade.

This resolution addresses those issues, and I do not think that many would argue with the historical record. My concern, however, is that the resolution fails to take into account the many significant developments of the U.S.-Lao relationship as well as the internal changes that are not only noteworthy, but address some of the issues raised in this resolution. We are involved in major efforts, and we are getting major cooperation in antidrug efforts in Laos through the cooperation of the Lao government aimed at reducing opium and amphetamine trade that reaches from Southeast Asia to the streets of the American cities.

Our people report a strong cooperation in this effort with the Lao authorities. In the areas of POW/MIA, hundreds of Americans from the Vietnam era are still missing in Laos, and we are sending forensic teams to Laos

several times a year to locate and repatriate the remains of those service people. Again, according to our government, we are receiving strong cooperation from the Lao government, but this resolution has been silent on that important effort.

Certainly the issue of human rights and the Hmong population, as well as other minorities, is a particularly sensitive subject in the Lao-American community in the United States, and I imagine that is the issue pushing this resolution to the forefront at this time. This resolution fails, however, to note that for a variety of reasons, some having to do with international pressure and some having to do with internal economics and politics, the Lao government has been urging Hmong and other dissidents to come out of the mountains where they have been hidden for many decades. The government has pledged to assist in the relocation and settlement of these groups, and I would note that Secretary of State Powell has told the Lao government the United States would like to offer assistance in these efforts.

While there is reason aplenty for hesitation given the fate of others throughout the world who have acquiesced in "resettlement" campaigns, the reports I received while in Laos, across the board, testified to the positive response of the refugees. Moreover, there were few, if any, reports of abusive or unhelpful treatment by the government. There is no mention of that in this resolution.

The concerns that this resolution raise about conditions in Laos are justified, and we should be clear that virtually identical situations exist in far too many countries. I would also like to make it very clear that the Lao government fully cooperate with the opinion of the international community that has long been concerned with the treatment of minority groups within their country and make sure they, in fact, are open to allowing our ambassador to travel to the areas in question where people are engaged in coming out, the Hmong and others, to make sure that the resettlement issues are occurring, that these people are being treated properly, and that there is no action taken against them.

So I would hope that the Lao government would be more open to the request of Secretary Powell, of our ambassador, of the international community. But again, I would state for those who have been there, for the international community, the international press, the suggestion is that this resettlement is going very fairly well, given the tensions that have existed for over so many years.

So I appreciate this resolution coming forward. I would hope that it would have given a little bit more recognition to those areas that we are getting cooperation, and that we will continue to work on opening this relationship with the Lao people, and clearly the support of the normal trade relations that we

may have an opportunity to vote on later would go a long way in terms of improving the economy and some of the human rights issues within the Nation of Laos.

Mr. Speaker, I have just returned from several days of meetings in Vientiane and Luang Prabang with not only our own very able ambassador, Douglas Hartwick and his excellent embassy staff, but also with Lao government officials and other private citizens—American and others—who are living and working in Laos. There is a more complex and changing picture than the wording of this resolution portrays.

Our discussions covered a wide range of topics, including that government's deficiencies in addressing human rights and political transparency issues that are detailed in H. Res. 402, and I was very clear in my conversations with Lao leaders about the urgency of meeting international standards particularly with respect to Hmong and other indigenous groups that have been the subject of ill-treatment and repression. I share the concerns of the authors of this resolution that Laos, like many other countries in Southeast Asia and elsewhere, should make substantial improvements in the openness of their political and judicial processes, comply with internationally recognized human, religious and labor rights, and promote the economic reforms that will raise the standard of living of their citizens through improved investment and trade.

This resolution addresses those issues, and I do not think many would argue with the historical record. My concern, however, is that this resolution fails to take into account very significant developments in the U.S.-Lao relationship, as well as internal changes that are not only noteworthy, but that address some of the issues raised in the resolution.

This is a delicate state in U.S.-Lao relations. We are deeply involved with that government in a range of initiatives that are critical to our own national security. I met with several U.S. personnel, for example, involved in major anti-drug efforts in cooperation with the Lao government aimed at reducing the opium and amphetamine trade that reaches from Southeast Asia to the streets of American cities. Our people reported strong cooperation from the Lao authorities and progress in turning Lao citizens against the drug trade, but this resolution ignores this cooperation.

We are also deeply involved in POW-MIA efforts in Laos, as was documented last week in the New York Times. Hundreds of Americans from the Vietnam War era are still missing in Laos, and we are sending forensic recovery teams to Laos several times a year to locate and repatriate the remains of servicemen. Again according to our government, we are receiving strong cooperation of the Lao government, but this resolution is silent on this important initiative.

Certainly the issue of human rights and the Hmong population, as well as other minorities, is a particularly sensitive subject in the Lao-American community in the United States, and I imagine that is the issue pushing this resolution to the forefront at this time. The resolution fails, however, to note that for a variety of reasons—some having to do with international pressure and some having to do with internal economics and politics—the Lao government has been urging Hmong and other dissidents to come out of the mountains where some

have hidden for several decades. The government has pledged to assist in the relocation and settlement of these groups, and I would note that Secretary of State Powell has told the Lao government that the United States would like to offer its assistance in these efforts. While there is reason aplenty for hesitation given the fate of others throughout the world who have acquiesced in "resettlement" campaigns, the reports I received in Laos, across the board, testified to the positive response of the refugees; moreover, there were few if any reports of abusive or unhelpful treatment by the government. But there is no mention of that cooperation in this resolution.

It is also important that the House understand that there have been some very serious incidents of violence and threats of violence with the Lao-American community in recent weeks, including assaults on those peacefully demonstrating in support of expanded trade with Laos, arson, and threats of assassination on certain radio stations. Members of the House should be helping to defuse this situation, not adding to the ill-feelings. So it is very important that what we say and do regarding Laos and the Lao community not be misunderstood or mis-stated.

The concerns that this resolution raises about conditions in Laos are justified, but we should be clear that virtually identical statements could be made about many other countries in the region or elsewhere in the world, including those with which we have very extensive economic and political relations. We want improvements and we should continue our efforts both bilaterally and through the U.N. and N.G.O.s to build a free and open society in Laos. One important step would be for more Members of Congress to visit the country and deliver the same message I did; yet only one other Member of the House has been to Laos in the last 5 years, I am told.

One important way for us to improve our relationship and encourage the kinds of reforms we would like to see in Laos is to grant Normal Trade Relations to that country. Laos is one of only three countries in the world with which we do not have NTR, and the only country with which we have full diplomatic relations lacking that status. Laos is far too small and poor to have an impact on the U.S. economy or jobs, but granting NTR will have a significant impact on the economy in that impoverished nation, allowing it to participate in the kind of positive economic improvements that have begun to transform Vietnam and Cambodia. Now that this resolution has been brought to the floor, I would hope that NTR for Laos would similarly be scheduled for House consideration.

I have many Lao-Americans in my own district, and I have had a close working relationship with them for a number of years. Most are refugees themselves from the repression of the post-war Lao government. They have built families, businesses, social and political organizations, and productive and cooperative lives in the United States. And together with many other Lao-Americans, they have begun to re-engage in a relationship with the country of their birth.

Members of the USA-Lao NTR Coalition, including the Lao-American Exchange Institute, the Laotian-American National Coalition and the Laotian-American Chamber of Commerce visited Laos last year and produced the important "Citizen Initiative Report." I would like to

recognize in particular Mr. Sary Tatpaporn, the Coalition's coordinator and vice president of the Laotian-American Chamber of Commerce, along with Dr. Richard Chansombat of the Lao-American Exchange, who authored the report on the trip detailing their meetings with government and private leaders. Many of these Lao-American leaders have reversed past opposition and now are urging the passage of NTR so that the economy of their former country can grow and more of their former countrymen can share in the prosperity that investment, trade and modernization can bring.

Our relationship with Laos is long and complex, and it is changing for the better. We should be encouraging the positive steps Laos is taking on a wide range of issues, and we should be expanding our cooperation with that country as we have with other nations whose domestic policies we continue to question. We also need to recognize that some of the suspicion and distrust within the Lao leadership is due to continuing threats against that government from opposition elements within the United States, as was acknowledged during the recently held conference of Lao-American leaders at the State Department.

At the same time, the Lao government must fully cooperate with the opinion of the international community that has long been concerned with the treatment of minority groups within the country, and wish to ensure that current resettlement effort comport with internationally recognized standards. As I have noted, our own Secretary of State has offered assistance in the resettlement efforts, and our Ambassador has requested permission for his staff to visit the areas where resettlement is occurring to assure that these citizens are being treated fairly. International relief agencies also are interested in monitoring the efforts. I would hope that the Lao government would fully cooperate with these initiatives and allow for independent observation of resettlement activities. That government should understand that a well-conducted, independently verified resettlement effort will dramatically affect the perception of Laos in the world community.

Consideration of this resolution today should mark the beginning of a renewed interest and engagement in Laos by the House, not a one-time venting of opinion that ignores positive developments that are taking place and jeopardizes a longer agenda we should continue to pursue, including passage of NTR later this year. I look forward to working constructively with my colleagues towards a closer relationship with Laos which will encourage the kinds of reforms we all hope will be implemented in that nation.

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BURTON of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I would like to just say the previous speaker made some very valid points, and I appreciate his remarks. However, the human rights violations in Laos continues to be widespread. There is a lot of suspicion on the part of the Hmong who are being talked about being relocated, and that suspicion, I think, looking at the history of the Laotian government, is valid. And all I

can say in closing, Mr. Speaker, is that human rights are just that, rights, and the Laotian government, which is a communist government, ought to take a hard look at history and realize that communism cannot last as long as it represses its people. And they ought to realize that long-term freedom and democracy is the only way to go, and if they do that, then I think the people in Laos have a bright future. But if they continue under this despotic communist regime, then I think they are in for more problems down the road.

In any event, I appreciate the gentleman from California (Mr. LANTOS) and his support and those who speak before me.

Mr. GREEN of Wisconsin. Mr. Speaker, before this House today I would like to restate my strong support for H. Res. 402, of which I am a cosponsor. As a leading critic of the Laotian government in the U.S. House of Representatives, I am very pleased that this legislation has made it to the House floor today, and believe it speaks directly to the question—which has been hotly debated in recent years—of whether or not we ought to grant Laos Normal Trade Relations status. As most members of this House know, I am staunchly opposed to our nation providing the brutal regime in Laos with any improved relationship until it gets its act together on a whole host of issues. Granting Laos NTR before we see some real movement toward change is ill-advised, inappropriate, and just plain wrong.

In support of H. Res. 402, I am asking today for a number of important items to be read into the RECORD. First, an article that recently appeared in the Appleton Post-Crescent on the case of Houa Ly, one of my Hmong-American constituents who went missing at the Thailand-Laos border in 1999. Second, a pair of letters 21 other Members of Congress and I sent to the administration last year, detailing many of the problems we see with the Laotian government, and reiterating our opposition to NTR for Laos. I appreciate in advance your consideration of the issues presented in these documents, and look forward to continuing to work to advance the freedom of the Laotian people.

FAMILY'S PLIGHT AT HEART OF TRADE RELATIONS CLASH (By Ed Culhane)

Neng Xiong Ly is consumed by sadness.

It has been five years since the Appleton woman's husband, Houa Ly, was waylaid on the banks of the Mekong River, the border between Thailand and his home country of Laos.

No one has seen him or heard from him since. Deprive of her husband, Neng Xiong Ly teeters on the edge of poverty. Asked to describe life without her husband, she wept softly. "I must be the poorest American," she said in her native language. Houa Ly (pronounced HOO-AH LEE) was 55 when he vanished, a veteran of the U.S. "secret war" in Laos, a Vietnam-era medic who saved the lives of American pilots shot down in the jungle. His disappearance, still shrouded in mystery, has re-emerged at the center of a political fight on the floor of the U.S. Congress. With the support of President Bush and the U.S. State Department, the communist government of Laos is seeking the benefits of Normal Trade Relations status. But a group of 21 congressmen and senators, led by Rep. Mark Green, R-Green Bay, so far

has blocked those benefits. Green argues that the country's leaders—who deny any knowledge of Ly—have not come clean. Even now, Green said, the last of the rebellious Hmong in the jungles of northern Laos are being systemically starved, raped, tortured and killed by Laotian forces and by divisions of Vietnamese soldiers operating in Laos. "It's brutal, it's repressive and it's barbaric," Green said. "It's hard for Americans to fully comprehend the barbarity and the contempt for human rights that exists in that area." Yer Ly of St. Paul, Minn., one of five daughters Houa Ly and Neng Xiong raised in the Fox Valley, said she misses her father terribly. Her children miss him. "He is just the best," she said. "There is no word to say he is this or that. He is just the best."

WORLDS APART

Neng Xiong Ly speaks little English. She works nights on a production line for a local manufacturer. Her take-home pay is about \$1,000 a month. All but \$100 of that is swallowed by the mortgage on their home. "Se is really struggling a lot," said her daughter, Ge, who acted as a translator. Before they were drawn into the war, Neng Xiong and Houa Ly lived the traditional tribal life of the Hmong people, hunting and gathering and practicing small-scale agriculture in the high plains and mountain jungles of northern Laos.

"Before the war, it was regular days," Neng Xiong Ly said. "Farm, cook, feed the animals." That life was lost when divisions of North Vietnamese soldiers poured across the northern Lao border in the 1960s. The Hmong, led by the charismatic and prescient Gen. Vang Pao, abandoned the high plains of Xiang Khoang province and established positions in the surrounding mountains where there were armed and funded by the CIA. As a young man, Houa Ly served as a medic with Pao's freedom fighters. Trained as commandos, they were fabled for their bravery and resourcefulness, for their intimate knowledge of the mountain jungles. When American pilots were shot down, the Hmong would find and rescue them, engage in fire-fights to protect them. Hunted by communist forces, these warrior farmers could no longer think in terms of "home." "Because of the war between America and Vietnam, the Vietnamese were always killing everyone," Neng Xiong Ly said. "There was no safety for the children and the women. They would have to move all the time." Houa Ly saved the lives of three American pilots during the war and helped dozens of others. His wife and two of his daughters said he did not carry weapons. "He was not a fighter, he was a nurse," said his youngest daughter, Yer Ly, who lives in St. Paul. Neng Xiong Ly cooked for soldiers and pilots at Long Cheng, a CIA airbase in the mountains of Xiang Khoang province. A photograph of the base hands in her living room. The United States abandoned Laos, and its Hmong allies, in 1973. Two years later, the country fell to the communist Pathet Lao, backed by the North Vietnamese Army. Thousands of Hmong were killed. Others were imprisoned in forced labor camps. Tens of thousands fled for Thailand. In October 1978, Houa Ly crossed the Mekong with his wife and four daughters. Yer Ly was born in Thailand. She was 8 months old when the family immigrated to the United States. They settled in the Fox Valley. "We are the people who helped the Americans," Neng Xiong Ly said. "That is why we had to move."

A FATEFUL TRIP

Houa Ly had traveled to Thailand once before, around 1987, to visit a sister who would later immigrate to the Fox Cities. His return trip in 1999 was a break from work as a machine operator with Wisconsin Tissue Mills.

"He said it had been a long time," Neng Xiong said. "He said he needed a vacation." At 6:30 a.m. May 7, 1999, Neng Xiong received a call from the U.S. embassy in Thailand. She was told her husband had been killed near the Laos border. "They just told me my husband went over the border to Laos and that somebody had taken him," she said. She fainted. A half-hour later, she called Yer Ly in St. Paul. She said she had no reason to live. On her end, Yer Ly couldn't speak, couldn't breathe. She fell to the floor, clutching the phone. Various unconfirmed reports about what happened to Houa Ly have emerged from congressional and private inquiries. He had traveled to Thailand with a relative, Neng Lee. They met two other Hmong-Americans, Michael and Hue Vang of California, on the trip. The four were at a water festival in Chiang Kong, Thailand, on the western bank of the Mekong. In Indochina, the New Year is celebrated for a week in mid-April. In Chiang Kong, the group was approached by a man who identified himself as the police chief from Ban Houayxay in Laos, just across the river. He said the police were allowing people into the country without visas to celebrate the festival.

Neng Lee and Hue Vang walked away to shop in Chiang Khong. When they returned, Ly and Michael Vang were gone. Witnesses said they were seen being forced into a boat that sped across the river into Laos.

An Associated Press story published in Asian Week in 2000 contained a similar version of the disappearance. A Hmong investigator was told by sources that Ly and Michael Vang, and two Hmong from Thailand, accepted the invitation to cross the river. Once in Laos, they were arrested. The Thailand Hmong escaped back across the river to tell the story.

Some news stories have referred to speculation that Ly and Michael Vang were in Indochina to provide assistance to Hmong rebels in northern Laos.

Green said he never has seen or heard any evidence to support this.

Hmong veterans in the Fox Cities said this theory makes no sense. While some Hmong send money to relatives in Laos, there is nothing two men could do for bands of Hmong hunted by divisions of troops deep in the interior.

WE WON'T GIVE UP

Six months after word of Houa Ly's disappearance, Green arranged a meeting in his office with Neng Xiong Ly, Yer Ly, another of the sisters and three representatives from the State Department. He also arranged a press conference for the Ly family and for other families of people missing in Laos.

State Department officials have conducted two on-site investigations in Laos, but were largely at the mercy of Laos officials, who at first delayed the effort and then placed restrictions on it. U.S. officials have learned nothing, said Green and family members.

Five years ago, State Department officials said finding Houa Ly and Michael Vang was a top priority.

Yer Ly no longer believes that. She fears that her father, a man who risked his life to save Americans in the jungles of Laos, will be forgotten.

Apart from Green, who has steadfastly pushed for a stronger effort, no one from the government calls anymore. No one will answer her questions.

"What I think is that he is an Asian-American citizen," she said, "and so it is not a top priority for them."

Green suspects Laotian officials were involved. At the very least, he said, they impeded the investigation. Although the State Department, pushing for Normal Trade Relations, now gives Laos better marks, its staff

was dissatisfied in November 1999, reporting the Lao government "has been slow to respond to our requests for access to the area and has tried to place restrictions on our investigators."

That was when it mattered, Green said. That was before the trail grew cold.

Still, Green said he would continue to press the U.S. government, and the United Nations, to learn the fates of Ly and Vang.

He, too, has suggested the United States would be putting greater pressure on Laos if the missing citizens were native-born Americans.

"This has been a great sadness for me," Green said. "We won't give up, as long as the families don't give up."

Neng Xiong Ly said she was deeply grateful to Green and to his chief of staff, Chris Tuttle.

"I want thank them from the bottom of my heart," she said. "They are the only two Americans who went out of their way to help."

Yer Ly thinks her father is still alive, locked away in a prison camp. Her only evidence comes from her heart.

"I don't have anything to prove my father is alive," she said. "It is a gut feeling that I have, that my mother has, that my whole family has."

"When someone you love . . . when they pass away . . . it is a different feeling. We don't have that feeling."

SEPTEMBER 9, 2003.

Hon. COLIN POWELL,
Secretary of State,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. SECRETARY: Attached is a letter, signed by myself and 21 of my colleagues in the U.S. House of Representatives, asking that you take no further steps toward granting Normal Trade Relations (NTR) to Laos.

Although the letter speaks largely for itself, many of my colleagues and I feel it is important to note that, since this letter was written and began circulating for co-signatures, several facts have come to light that further reinforce our assertion that granting NTR to Laos is an imprudent step at this time.

Among these disturbing developments:

(1) In June, the Laotian government arrested, imprisoned, tried, convicted and sentenced to 15 years in prison a Lutheran minister from St. Paul, Minnesota. While in captivity, this U.S. citizen was denied consular access for over a week and subjected to a ridiculous "trial" before the Laotian judiciary system. Though eventually released after more than a month, the Laotians' handling of this case speaks volumes about their commitment to friendly relations with the United States.

(2) Two well-respected European journalists traveling with the American mentioned above were subjected to the same treatment, all apparently because of the group's investigation of Laotian government human rights abuses against ethnic Hmong minorities in remote areas of Laos.

(3) According to the BBC, Laotian representatives met in Pyongyang with representatives of North Korea just last month. There, "both sides . . . exchanged views on the need to boost cooperation . . . (in) talks (that) proceeded in a friendly atmosphere." This meeting is consistent with the Laotian government's past close relationship with the North Koreans.

(4) According to the Vietnam News Agency and other sources, in May "Top leaders in Myanmar and Laos . . . underscored the need to strengthen their cooperation in security and other fields . . . the leaders expressed their delight with the two countries' growing friendship and highly valued the mutual as-

sistance and successful cooperation in the spheres of politics, security, economy, trade and socio-culture." Obviously, myself and others in both houses of Congress find such statements to be very troubling given what we all know about the Burmese government.

(5) Finally, according to this year's State Department "Voting Practices in the United Nations" document, Laos ranks 184 out of 186 countries in its record of agreement with the United States in U.N. General Assembly votes. In fact, this document shows that North Korea's record of agreement with the U.S. (10.9 percent) is more than double that of Laos' (5.4 percent). Iran, the world's most prominent state sponsor of terrorism, was almost four times more likely to support us (19.7 percent) than Laos (5.4 percent). This, perhaps more than anything else, is the clearest statement that Laos is not yet ready to improve relations between our two countries.

Thank you for your kind attention to this matter. I look forward to working together with you on this and other issues in the future.

Sincerely,

MARK GREEN,
Member of Congress.

SEPTEMBER 9, 2003.

Hon. PHIL CRANE,
Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade, Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

Hon. SANDER LEVIN,
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Trade, Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN CRANE AND RANKING MEMBER LEVIN: We write today to implore you to take no further steps toward granting Normal Trade Relations (NTR) status to the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR). We respectfully assert that granting NTR to Laos at this time would in fact represent an ill-conceived reward for the consistently dreadful behavior the LPDR regime has exhibited in recent years at home, abroad, and in its bilateral relations with the United States. We offer the following seven facts as evidence the LPDR has not yet earned such an upgrade in its trade status.

(1) Two U.S. citizens remain missing after disappearing at the Laotian border in 1999. The LPDR government has been uncooperative in its dealings with U.S. authorities working to investigate their case, and the LPDR government may have been involved in the disappearance itself. According to American eyewitnesses, U.S. citizens Houa Ly and Michael Vang went missing on April 19, 1999 after having last been seen with Lao government authorities near the Laos-Thailand border. U.S. investigators have since pursued the case, but the State Department has acknowledged a lack of cooperation by the LPDR in the investigation, stating in November 1999 that the Lao government "has been slow to respond to our requests for access to the area and has tried to place restrictions on our investigators." In July of 1999, staff members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee traveled to Laos and received information on the case from what they characterized as a "very credible source." The staff report filed after the trip states that, "with a great degree of detail, the tip we received corroborated Hmong-American suspicions that the men in fact crossed into Laos and that the government of Laos captured and killed Messrs. Vang and Ly."

(2) As documented in this year's State Department Report on Human Rights Practices, the LPDR continues to be of the world's most reprehensible abusers of human rights—with a repertoire that includes torture, harsh restrictions on the press and free

speech, and imprisonment of people for their religious beliefs. The report speaks for itself, stating that last year: "The (Lao) Government's human rights record remained poor, and it continued to commit serious abuses. Citizens do not have the right to change their government. Members of the security forces abused detainees, especially those suspected of insurgent or antigovernment activity. Prisoners were abused and tortured, and prison conditions generally are extremely harsh and life threatening. . . . The judiciary was subject to executive, legislative, and LPRP influence, was corrupt, and did not ensure citizens due process. The Government infringed on citizens' privacy rights. The Government restricted freedom of speech, the press, assembly, and association. The Government continued to restrict freedom of religion, and police and provincial authorities arrested and detained more than 60 members of Christian churches, with 4 members of religious communities in custody or incarcerated for their religious beliefs at year's end." These appalling human rights abuses are of particular concern in the so-called "Saysamboun Special Zone" in Laos, where reports of LPDR military offenses against ethnic minorities are common and disturbing. Finally, it is important to note that independent human rights monitoring organizations such as Amnesty International continue to be barred from entering Laos by the LPDR government.

(3) The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom this year called Laos one of the world's worst violators of religious freedom, stating that forced renunciations of faith and imprisonment of people for their religious beliefs are tragically frequent. In its 2003 report to the president and Congress, the commission urged the Bush administration to name Laos a "Country of Particular Concern," which would place it in the company of such terrifying regimes as Saddam Hussein's Iraq, Sudan, Burma and North Korea. According to the commissions report, "for at least the last several years, the government of Laos has engaged in particularly severe violations of religious freedom . . . these include the arrest and prolonged detention and imprisonment of members of religious minorities on account of their religious activities, as well as instances where Lao officials have forced Christians to renounce their faith. Between 100 and 200 individuals have been arrested since 1999. At the same time, dozens of churches have been closed. These violations have continued to be committed in the past year. . . ."

(4) Shockingly, the LPDR continues to foster close ties with Kim Jong-Il's Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)—stating two years ago that relations "of friendship and cooperation" between Laos and the North Korean pariah state "are steadily growing stronger," and congratulating the North Korean people "on the shining successes made in their efforts to build a powerful nation . . . under the wise leadership of Kim Jong-Il." In a joint communiqué issued July 17, 2001 by the leadership of the LPDR and DPRK, the North Korean government also commended the Lao government for the "great successes made in their efforts to consolidate and develop the people's democratic system and estimated the daily rising role and position of the LPDR."

(5) The LPDR recently held state-sanctioned rallies speaking out against U.S. military action in Iraq in the most inflammatory of terms—stating that "the war will bring disaster to the whole of humanity," and "demand(ing) the U.S. respect the peace and sovereignty of Iraq." These and other similarly belligerent comments were transmitted throughout Laos on state-run radio and around the globe through various media services.

(6) A substantial majority of Laotian-Americans—many of whom know, first hand, the brutality meted out by the LPDR regime—are strongly opposed to offering NTR to Laos. These people, many of whom are Hmong-Americans who assisted the United States military during the Vietnam War, view the offer of NTR to the government of Laos as a fundamental betrayal of not only them personally, but of our American principles. According to the most recent census, there are approximately 170,000 Hmong living in the United States. An almost equal number of Lao live in the United States as well.

(7) Although some argue that Laos presents a potentially lucrative market for U.S. companies, the facts show otherwise. While proponents of improved trade relations with Laos claim that the potential economic benefits outweigh the significant moral questions about Laos as a trading partner, the truth is that the LPDR's Gross Domestic Product in 2001 was estimated to be \$9.2 billion. For comparison, the Gross Municipal Product of Fort Wayne, Indiana in 2001 was more than double that amount: \$18.8 billion. Laos' authoritarian internal economic policies, not a lack of trade with the United States, has created this dismal reality. Without substantial change in those policies, neither the people of Laos nor the United States will ever benefit economically from NTR.

This letter should not be interpreted as a statement that we believe the door to NTR for Laos should be shut forever. In our opinion, however, Laos has failed miserably to demonstrate that it is ready for or deserves NTR at this time. In fact, in the six years since the negotiation of the U.S.-LPDR bilateral trade agreement, the Lao regime's record on basic issues like those mentioned above has actually become worse, not better.

We believe that if, over the next few years, the LPDR government is able to successfully demonstrate concrete improvements in these areas of concern, consideration of NTR for Laos may be appropriate. Until then, however, we should send a strong message to the LPDR regime that economic rewards from the United States will not be forthcoming unless it can improve its abysmal record.

Respectfully,

Mark Green, Barney Frank, Duncan Hunter, Earl Pomeroy, John Doolittle, Patrick Kennedy, William Delahunt, Ron Kind, James Langevin, Howard Coble, Robin Hayes, Sue Myrick, Lincoln Diaz-Balart, Christopher Smith, Gil Gutknecht, Devin Nunes, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Thomas Petri, George Radanovich, Mark Kennedy, Frank Wolf, Dana Rohrabacher.

Mr. PETRI. Mr. Speaker, as a long time supporter of Hmong veterans and their families in Wisconsin and across the United States, I am pleased to be a cosponsor and express my support for House Resolution 402 which calls for democratic and human rights reforms in Laos.

Many Americans don't realize the vital role Hmong soldiers played in the Vietnam War. School history books often ignore that before U.S. soldiers even landed in Vietnam or Laos, CIA agents arrived to train young Hmong men and women to fight against their oppressors. These brave Hmong fought valiantly for democracy and for freedom for their people. They rescued downed American pilots and took bullets that otherwise would have found their way to the bodies of American soldiers.

In defense of their country and in service to U.S. troops, nearly 40,000 Hmong troops were killed, approximately 58,000 were injured in combat and more than 2,500 are still missing in action today. These numbers don't begin to

represent the thousands of Hmong soldiers and civilians hunted down and massacred by communist forces after the U.S. armed forces began their withdrawal from the region in 1975. The survivors lost many loved ones and lost their homeland. The United States owes these veterans a great deal.

Edgar Buell, a former senior U.S. official working with the Hmong during the war years, best summed up their dedication to the U.S. and western democratic principles when he said, "Everyone of them that died, that was an American back home that didn't die. Somebody in nearly every Hmong family was either fighting or died from fighting They became refugees because we . . . encouraged them to fight for us. I promised them myself: 'Have no fear, we will take care of you.'"

Yet, we hear reports that the persecution of the Hmong in Laos continues to this day, with charges of starvation, families being separated, and other acts of violence.

Over the last twenty years, thousands of Hmong have settled in Wisconsin and other places across the United States, sharing their tragic history and brave sacrifices with their fellow Americans. On their behalf, we must fulfill Edgar Buell's promise and encourage the government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic to stop civil rights violations against the Hmong and others, and allow free and open political activities in Laos.

Mr. BURTON of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. COLE). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 402.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds of those present have voted in the affirmative.

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

EXPRESSING SENSE OF CONGRESS REGARDING ARBITRARY DETENTION OF DR. WANG BINGZHANG

Mr. BURTON of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 326) expressing the sense of Congress regarding the arbitrary detention of Dr. Wang Bingzhang by the Government of the People's Republic of China and urging his immediate release.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. CON. RES. 326

Whereas Dr. Wang Bingzhang is a permanent resident of the United States and his sister and daughter are United States citizens;

Whereas Dr. Wang received his Ph.D. at McGill University in Canada in coronary-arterial research and is a well-respected leader