

NOTIFICATION OF INTENT TO ENTER INTO FREE TRADE AGREEMENT WITH THE SULTANATE OF OMAN—MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES (H. DOC. NO. 109-60)

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following message from the President of the United States; which was read and, together with the accompanying papers, without objection, referred to the Committee on Ways and Means and ordered to be printed:

To the Congress of the United States:

Consistent with section 2105(a)(1)(A) of the Trade Act of 2002, (Public Law 107-210) (the “Trade Act”), I am pleased to notify the Congress of my intention to enter into a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the Sultanate of Oman.

The Agreement will generate export opportunities for U.S. companies, farmers, and ranchers, help create jobs in the United States, and help American consumers save money while offering them more choices. Entering into an FTA with Oman will build on the FTAs that we already have with Israel, Jordan, and Morocco, as well as the FTA that we have concluded with Bahrain, and will be an important step on the path to fulfilling my vision of developing economic growth and democracy in the Middle East and creating a U.S.—Middle East Free Trade Area (MEFTA) by 2013.

Consistent with the Trade Act, I am sending this notification at least 90 days in advance of signing the FTA. My Administration looks forward to working with the Congress in developing appropriate legislation to approve and implement this Agreement.

GEORGE W. BUSH.
THE WHITE HOUSE, October 17, 2005.

ON THE IRAQ VOTE

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

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Speaker, the Washington Post has done it again for us. They ran an article on the retirement of Turkey’s ambassador to the United States, and I was struck by a comment that the ambassador made regarding Iraq and our efforts to reshape that country in the Middle East.

This is what he said: “Pessimism debilitates you. Don’t ignore the facts, but be optimistic. Some of the apparent clumsiness is democracy in the making.” Democracy in the making.

Mr. Speaker, too many in this body and in the media have fed the pessimism. Those of us standing with the President and our military in Iraq are not playing Pollyanna on this. We know it is going to be a tough, tough endeavor. But we believed and we still believe that failing to act was a poor long-term solution to the fundamental crisis of terrorism that exists in the Middle East.

Today, we should all take a moment and praise our troops, our leadership, and the Iraqi people for voting on a constitution last Saturday. Nearly 63 percent of eligible voters cast a ballot. That is tremendous, and it should be cause for celebration both here and around the world.

Again, to quote the ambassador, “Pessimism debilitates you.” Let us celebrate this success.

STOP ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION

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

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, illegal immigration is a huge concern to the vast majority of Americans. Some States are welcoming illegal aliens with driver’s licenses, in-State college tuition, and access to social services. One has to wonder how can this be. It appears to many that we are rewarding those that break the laws.

Whoever said crime does not pay must not have been talking about those who enter our country illegally. Crossing the border illegally is a criminal act; however, we give these people access to everything you can imagine. Lax enforcement of our immigration policies is making every day payday for illegal aliens.

States other than Texas, Arizona, and California are now more burdened than ever picking up the tab for illegal aliens, with Georgia, my home State, ranking in the top 10 with illegal alien populations.

Hospitals and others are being forced to scrape the bottom of the barrel to look for money, money that should be spent on American citizens and those here legally.

Mr. Speaker, not tomorrow, not the day after that, not next week, not next month, but today, today is the time to stop illegal immigration. H.R. 3693 will do just that.

IRAQ ELECTION ON CONSTITUTION

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

Mr. KINGSTON. Mr. Speaker, as the representative of the 48th Brigade and the 3rd Infantry Division, I have thousands of constituents in Iraq. I look each day, as most Americans do, for good news to come from that area of the world; and good news did come this weekend with their unprecedented election.

This election, which had a lot of high stakes, will hopefully, when the tally is counted, ratify their constitution, which so many have worked on in the international community for so long.

The election itself, though, was a great success, with an over-60 percent turnout. In over 6,000 different polling places, violence was absent. Compare that to the June election, when there

was a lot more absence and a lot less participation. This Saturday was a success.

Even the Sunni population, the minority population that has a lot of apprehension about this constitution, showed up in record numbers. And, remember, they boycotted the election in June.

There is a lot of progress that is happening in Iraq. I hope that this constitution does pass. I hope that the elections in December are a success. I hope that the new national government takes hold and does a great job of moving this great country to democracy.

America has made this possible, and America is standing behind our friends in Iraq.

□ 1730

SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BURGESS). Under the Speaker’s announced policy of January 4, 2005, and under a previous order of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH

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

Mr. MORAN of Kansas. Mr. Speaker, this evening I rise to recognize October as National Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Thankfully, we have made progress in raising awareness and attention of domestic violence and providing assistance to the affected victims. However, it is a problem that has not gone away.

We must not forget about these crimes that disrupt homes and destroy families. It is estimated that over 2 million acts of domestic violence take place each year here in the United States. According to a recent study in my home State of Kansas, one domestic violence act occurs every 24 minutes.

Domestic violence is an issue that affects all aspects of our society and is not bound by race, economics or age. It can be blamed for increased medical care costs, decreased productivity, and increased absence from work. Domestic violence also promotes a culture of depression, hopelessness and fear. One incidence of domestic violence can create a cycle of despair that is difficult for not only the victim but also the entire family to overcome.

In my small hometown of Plainville, Kansas, a family grieves over the loss of their daughter. Patty Kruse-Hicks, a kind, loving daughter, and a devoted mother to her three children, lost her life due to domestic violence. On April 19, 2004, the world changed forever for her family and all those who loved her. Patty is more than a statistic. Her legacy and love will live in the hearts of

all who knew her. Too often we think an act of domestic violence does not occur on our street, in our hometown, or to people and families we know, but this act of violence tells me that no street, no community, no hometown is immune.

There are other victims of domestic violence who are often overlooked. Each year an estimated 3.3 million children are exposed to violence committed by family members against their mother or caretaker. During 2002 in Kansas alone, there were over 8,000 cases where children were the victims of domestic violence. Children who see violence are more likely to commit or suffer violence when they become adults. The cycle of despair continues from one generation to the next.

While the realities of domestic violence are grim, we do have hope. Our hope stems from the belief that with education, resources and support, victims of domestic violence can overcome their circumstances. Hope is what sustains and motivates the nine domestic violence centers I represent in my rural 69-county district. These agencies help advocate for victims, provide essential services, and spearhead efforts to increase domestic violence awareness throughout most part of rural Kansas.

I would like to highlight one such effort. In Emporia, the SOS, Inc., agency recently partnered with the Girl Scout Council of the Flint Hills, and their Studio 2 Be Troop, including 40 girls, ranging from the ages of 11 to 17. This effort focused on teaching these youth about domestic violence and the legal system. The highlight of this year-long project was a mock trial event that the youth participated in during the month of September. The troop girls were the defense and prosecution teams, the jury, and even the victims of crimes. This project was supported by the legal community, and many lawyers and judges gave their time to work with these Girl Scouts. This project taught the participants that domestic violence is not okay and our communities should take it very seriously. This project was a one-of-a-kind experience for these girls, and garnered significant national attention.

Mr. Speaker, tonight I rise to recognize October as National Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Thankfully, we have made progress in raising awareness and attention to domestic violence and providing assistance to victims. However, it is a problem that certainly has not gone away. We must not forget about these crimes that disrupt homes and destroy families. It is estimated that 2 million acts of domestic violence will take place this year in the United States. According to a recent study, in my home State of Kansas one domestic violence act occurs every 24 minutes.

Mr. Speaker, I ask for continued support and assistance for the domestic violence programs we in Congress have responsibility for.

GUN LIABILITY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. McCARTHY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. McCARTHY. Mr. Speaker, this week the House will take up the National Rifle Association's top legislative priority for the 109th Congress. We will vote on legislation granting the gun industry unprecedented immunity from liability lawsuits. Nearly no other consumer product manufacturers or sellers have this kind of protection.

The NRA says this bill will prevent frivolous lawsuits that may bankrupt the gun industry, but a closer look reveals this bill tries to fix a problem that actually does not exist.

Over the past decade, there have been over 10 million lawsuits filed here in the U.S. and only 57 involved the gun industry. According to the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, no lawsuit against the gun industry has ever been dismissed as frivolous by a judge. Some of these suits have been dismissed for other reasons, and some have been successful. The point is the current system does work.

Unworthy cases are not coming to trial so why do we need to close the courthouse doors to those who were legitimately victimized by gun industry negligence or incompetence? Do not let the NRA rhetoric fool you. This legislation is not about protecting an honest gun dealer who legally sells a gun to someone who later commits a crime. This legislation protects cases of gross negligence that lead to the injuries and death of unsuspecting victims.

For example, the owner of the Bull's Eye Shooter Supply Store in Washington State was successfully sued because he could not account for over 239 guns in his inventory. One of these guns was the Bushmaster used in the D.C. sniper killings. The D.C. sniper murderers were allowed to get their hands on a gun because of a gun seller's negligence. But now, House leadership thinks the D.C. snipers' victims should not have their day in court.

We should not let negligence and incompetence that results in death or injury go unpunished in any industry. Stripping away the threat of legal action will seriously jeopardize efforts to make guns safer. Without the threat of liability suits, the gun industry will have no financial incentive to incorporate gun locks, smart gun technology, and safety triggers into their products.

Imagine if similar legislation were passed 40 years ago to cover the auto industry. Today our cars would not have seat belts, air bags or antilock brakes.

Mr. Speaker, instead of stopping nonexistent frivolous lawsuits, we should be protecting the public from gun violence. I submitted amendments to this bill to the Committee on Rules. One amendment will allow liability lawsuits against those who negligently sell cop killer bullets. These are bullets

that are similar to the ones used in the murder of my husband and critically wounded my son in 1993.

I will also seek to continue negligence lawsuits against those who irresponsibly sell large-capacity clips. Large-capacity clips were used in the Long Island shooting which took down my husband and son and many other family members. If we had smaller clips, we would not have had as many killings on that train. If we did not have the cop killer bullets out on the streets, maybe my son would not have been injured so severely, and there is a possibility my husband might be alive.

These clips represent a serious homeland security threat if a terrorist were to use them. Without the threat of lawsuits, guns may end up in the hands of people who should not have them.

Mr. Speaker, we already have lost 33,000 Americans a year to gun violence. We lose 5,200 children per year. Independent studies show that gun violence costs our health care system over \$100 billion a year. The average cost of each firearm fatality, including medical care, police services, and lost productivity is over \$1 million. I can testify because my son's bills are over that.

But the Department of Justice says only 2 percent of Federal gun crimes are prosecuted, and 20 of the 22 Federal gun laws on the books are not effectively enforced. We need to give our law enforcement agencies the tools to do their jobs efficiently.

We cannot proceed with this legislation unless we can ensure the National Instant Background Check is fully effective. Currently, half of the States have entered less than 60 percent of the felony convictions into the NICS system. In 13 States, and my colleague just talked about domestic violence, restraining orders are not accessible through the NICS system.

Too many of those not allowed to buy guns slip through the cracks of our background check system. That is why I submitted an amendment to permit negligence lawsuits against the gun industry until 90 percent of the felony convictions and other disqualifying criteria are included in the NICS database.

I have introduced H.R. 1415, a bill to give grants to help the States keep their NICS information current and accurate. Honest gun sellers do not want to sell criminals guns. My amendment would give them the peace of mind that all of their sales are to responsible gun owners. However, we still should not give breaks to dishonest and incompetent gun sellers by giving them immunity from lawsuits resulting from their negligence.

But if the gun lobby and its faithful servants in leadership insist on taking up this bill, we must make sure safeguards are in place to protect the public.

Mr. Speaker, our priorities are misplaced when it comes to preventing gun violence. We need to change the dialogue.