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House of Representatives

The House met at 10:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. ISRAEL).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
April 1, 2008.

I hereby appoint the Honorable STEVE ISRAEL to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

NANCY PELOSI,
Speaker, House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2007, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 30 minutes and each Member, other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip, limited to 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) for 5 minutes.

UNITED STATES-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The strongest argument that can be made for the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement is not that it is good for Colombia but that it is good for us. The U.S. has few barriers to trade, so currently most of Colombia's exports enter the U.S. with few or no restrictions. But Colombia has many barriers to our goods. This is what opponents of the agreement can't seem to grasp: The

Free Trade Agreement will remove Colombia's barriers to U.S. goods. Of course Colombia will benefit economically but we will benefit more.

The second strongest argument is that our friends and enemies in this hemisphere are watching how we treat a loyal ally that is being threatened from many sides. If we do not pass this agreement, Mr. Speaker, and it is clearly in our interest to do so, the only possible conclusion that these countries can come to is that we made a deliberate choice to back away from an ally at this most crucial and critical time.

Mr. Speaker, this debate should be more about how this agreement will impact in a positive way our U.S. economy. An honest debate can have only one outcome—strong support for passage of the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement and as soon as possible.

The capital of Colombia is only 3 hours away from my district in Miami, Florida. The strong ties that have developed between our communities are symbolic of the enduring friendship that our Nation shares with Colombia. As Florida's seventh largest global trading partner, passage of the FTA has the potential to boost Florida's exports to Colombia by \$161 million in just the first year. Also significant is the agreement's ability to support the creation of nearly 5,000 new jobs throughout the State within the first 3 years of its passage. The positive impact that this FTA could have for the prosperity and security of our two nations, and indeed the hemisphere as a whole, cannot be denied. Serving as the steadfast bulwark against radical, anti-American regimes throughout the region, Colombia has proven time and time again its commitment to respecting human rights and democracy.

Now it is time for us to step up, Mr. Speaker, and not only support Colombia's efforts but provide Americans here at home the opportunity to ben-

efit from our trade relationship as well. We hope that this trade agreement will be before us as rapidly as possible.

HONORING CESAR CHAVEZ'S BIRTHDAY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SIREN) for 2 minutes.

Mr. SIREN. Mr. Speaker, today I join my colleagues in celebrating the life of Cesar Chavez. Eighty-one years ago, Cesar Chavez began his life on March 31 and he continues to serve as an inspiration to thousands.

Cesar Chavez was a pioneer for civil rights and labor rights. He was a man that understood that in order to achieve change, sacrifices are necessary. Due to his hard work and dedication to his community, he successfully founded the United Farm Workers Union, the largest union protecting the rights of our country's many farm laborers. Currently, 10 States officially honor the memory of Cesar Chavez by celebrating a holiday in his name. My colleague, Congressman BACA, has introduced legislation, H. Res. 76, to establish a national Cesar Chavez Day to honor this important man through volunteer projects, educational activities, and cultural celebrations, among other events. I thank Congressman BACA for introducing this legislation and for helping to bring Cesar's life and legacy to the Members of Congress and to our constituents throughout the country. He truly is a national hero.

UNITED STATES-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. WELLER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. WELLER of Illinois. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I join my colleague, ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN of Florida, in

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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urging the Speaker of the House to bring to this floor the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement, an agreement that's good for Illinois farmers, good for Illinois workers, and good for Illinois manufacturers.

Let me begin by asking some important questions. What nation in Latin America is the most longstanding democracy? The Republic of Colombia. What nation in Latin America is the United States' most reliable and dependable partner against narcotics and against terrorism? The Republic of Colombia. What nation today has the most popular elected official year after year after year in their own country? That is President Uribe of Colombia. The U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement is a good agreement for my State of Illinois. We are a big winner, as is the United States.

In 2006, Illinois exported \$214 million in exports to Colombia, but that's just the beginning. Why? Because Illinois exports, U.S. exports to Colombia are taxed by tariffs. But their exports to the United States are not taxed by tariffs. So right now trade is a one-way street. We want to make it a two-way street.

As a result of this trade agreement, 80 percent of U.S. exports that are currently taxed will be duty-free immediately. And as we know, our exports to other countries grow 50 percent faster with countries we have trade agreements with. So it's a win-win-win for American workers, American farmers, and American manufacturers. We want to be competitive with Asia.

We know Colombia is a reliable partner, our most important ally. We know Colombia is a longstanding democracy. We also know that President Uribe is popular. He was elected to stem the violence in Colombia. He was elected to push the FARC, the leftist narcotrafficking terrorist organization, out of the country. And he's made tremendous progress. And today because of his success in expanding government presence throughout the country, bringing stability and order and safety and security to Colombia, his approval rating in his own country year after year has been over 80 percent. Compare that to this Congress which has a 15 percent approval rating.

Now there are those who oppose this trade agreement and they are the same people who have opposed every trade agreement. They say not enough is done for labor. When the Peru and Colombia trade agreements were finalized, my Democratic friends said we needed to do more regarding labor rights. Both Peru and Colombia complied. And, of course, Peru has been ratified, but Colombia has not. Now they say that there's too much labor violence in Colombia. Well, let's look at the facts. Seventy-one percent of Colombians say they are more secure under President Uribe. Seventy-three percent of Colombians say Uribe respects human rights. Homicides are down 40 percent. Kidnappings are down

76 percent. In fact, the murder rate in Colombia today is lower than Washington, D.C., lower than Baltimore.

Here are the facts on labor violence: The last 2 years, President Uribe has hired 418 new prosecutors; 545 new investigators; created over 2,166 new posts overall in the Prosecutor General's office; and increased funding for prosecution of those who commit violent acts by 75 percent.

Carlos Rodriguez, president of the United Workers Confederation, said about these new posts: "Never in the history of Colombia have we achieved something so important." Now when it comes particularly to labor leaders, President Uribe has allocated almost \$39 million to providing bodyguards for protection for labor union leaders. One thousand five hundred union leaders and activists provided protection, the second largest protected group in the nation of Colombia. And it's been successful. In fact, no labor leader under this protection has lost his life or experienced violence.

As the Washington Post noted yesterday, the murder rate for labor activists is lower than the national rate for the rest of the country. So President Uribe has made tremendous progress in reducing violence. For those who point to labor activists being the subject of labor violence, he's made even greater success in reducing violence.

I would also note that the International Labor Organization has removed Colombia from its labor watch list and Colombia has agreed to permanent International Labor Organization presence in Colombia. Perhaps most telling, 14 Colombian labor union leaders have personally given their support to the Trade Promotion Agreement and they represent 79,000 organized workers. We continue to hear opposition with no explanation.

The bottom line is this is a good trade agreement. Colombia is our best ally. If you care about the future of Latin America, if you care about democracy, if you care about security, we need to bring the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement to this floor for a vote.

MARKING CESAR CHAVEZ'S BIRTHDAY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GREEN) for 2 minutes.

Mr. GENE GREEN of Texas. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and colleagues.

Today I rise to honor a hardworking labor leader, Cesar Chavez, who founded the United Farm Workers Union and dedicated his life to promote non-violence through boycotts and strikes that would protect farm workers from the dangers of pesticides, low wages, and the denial of fair and free elections.

I met Cesar Chavez in the 1970s when he came to organize farm workers in Texas. I was a young Texas State Representative and was inspired by his

leadership then and as he inspires people today in this century.

Cesar Estrada Chavez was born on March 31, 1927, in Yuma, Arizona. It was 10 years later in 1937 that like many other migrant families, his parents lost their farm and their home. This was a hardship that led them to join thousands of other migrant farmer workers to toil in the California fields.

In 1944 Cesar Chavez enlisted in the U.S. Navy where he served and fought for the United States in the Pacific during World War II. He later married Helen Fabela and fathered eight children. Although Cesar Chavez was not able to complete high school because his family required his helping hands in the California fields, he not only endured the hardships of migrant working conditions but experienced the injustices that he later made into a personal crusade for the migrant farm workers.

His personal struggles as a migrant farm worker led him to find a non-violent way to help Hispanic farm workers. In the 1950s, Cesar quietly began to study and work for the better working conditions of migrant workers. His persistent struggle to help Hispanics led him to organize the National Farm Worker group in Fresno, California. Cesar Chavez was one of the first Hispanic activists that begun what was a series of boycotts and strikes against California grape growers. Most notably, he called a boycott against Schenley Industries, a major California grape producer. His series of boycotts and strikes caused a national awareness that provoked the late Senate Robert F. Kennedy to criticize local officials after uncovering strike-breaking practices against farm workers. The National Farm Workers Union later reached a groundbreaking settlement with Schenley Industries that marked the first contract ever signed for farm workers in the United States.

This was a monumental achievement that the United Farm Workers would not have been able to accomplish without the hard work and determination of this courageous individual.

As the struggle to protect farm workers continued, Cesar Chavez even sacrificed his health several times by fasting. He saw his fight as a personal fight to end the terrible suffering of the farm workers and their children.

Cesar Chavez worked tirelessly to improve the lives of America's farm workers by securing their rights to organize and bargain collectively for fair working conditions. Chavez showed us that together we can make a safe and prosperous America with a strong and vibrant economy—an America with good jobs and good pay. Fifteen years after his passing, his life's work and legacy continues to inspire millions.

CESAR CHAVEZ

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. BACA) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BACA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of honoring Cesar Chavez,