

Peace, contributed to their communities and committed themselves to peace and justice.

□ 1630

This Saturday for the second year in a row I will join with members of the Louisville community for the King Memorial Walk and Peace Fest. We will gather at the Muhammad Ali Center to share stories of yesterday's struggles and a vision for tomorrow's successes, before walking as one to the north side of the Ohio River. Crossing that boundary once was a journey between slavery and salvation, Jim Crow and justice, oppression and opportunity for far too many Americans. But this weekend, when we return to Louisville, we will enter a community proud of its diversity, alive with the spirit of peace, and working toward a more just future for all.

While it is true that we cannot bring Martin Luther King, Jr., back, by promoting his teachings, Service for Peace ensures that we will never really lose him, either. The activism of Service for Peace is so much more than a tribute to a great American hero; it is a practical and proven strategy to reduce drug use, crime, violence, and murder in my community and others throughout our great Nation.

I know my colleagues will join me in honoring Service for Peace, just as Service for Peace honors the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

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

(Mr. BURTON of Indiana addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

WIN-WIN FOR U.S. AND COLOMBIA

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

Mr. WELLER of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement, and I urge the Speaker of the House to bring this important measure before the House for an up-or-down vote, and submit for the RECORD two articles, one a column recently published in the New York Times by Edward Schumacher-Matos, a former foreign correspondent for the Times and a visiting professor of Latin American studies at Harvard, as well as an editorial in this week's Washington Post in support of the trade agreement.

KILLING A TRADE PACT

(By Edward Schumacher-Matos)

President Bush has been urging Congress to approve a pending trade agreement with Colombia, an ally that recently almost went to war with Venezuela and Hugo Chávez. Even though the agreement includes the labor and environmental conditions that Congress wanted, many Democrats, includ-

ing Senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, now say that Colombia must first punish whomever has been assassinating the members of the nation's trade unions before the agreement can pass.

An examination of the Democrats' claims, however, finds that their faith in the assertions of human-rights groups is more righteous than right. Union members have been assassinated, but the reported number is highly exaggerated. Even one murder for union organizing is atrocious, but isolated killings do not justify holding up the trade agreement.

All sides agree that trade-union murders in Colombia, like all violence, have declined drastically in recent years. The Colombian unions' own research center says killings dropped to 39 last year from a high of 275 in 1996.

Yet in a report being released next week, the research center says the killings remain "systematic" and should be treated by the courts as "genocide" designed to "exterminate" unionism in Colombia. Most human-rights groups cite the union numbers and conclude, as Human Rights Watch did this year, that "Colombia has the highest rate of violence against trade unionists in the world."

Even if that is true, it was far safer to be in a union than to be an ordinary citizen in Colombia last year. The unions report that they have 1 million members. Thirty-nine killings in 2007 is a murder rate of 4 unionists per 100,000. There were 15,400 homicides in Colombia last year, not counting combat deaths, according to the national police. That is a murder rate of 34 citizens per 100,000.

Many in Congress, moreover, assume that "assassinations" means murders that are carried out for union activity. But the union research center says that in 79 percent of the cases going back to 1986, it has no suspect or motive. The government doesn't either.

When the Inter American Press Association several years ago investigated its list of murdered Colombian journalists, it found that more than 40 percent were killed for nonjournalistic reasons. The unions have never done a similar investigation.

There are, however, a growing number of convictions for union murders in Colombia. There were exactly zero convictions for them in the 1990s, Colombia's bloodiest decade, when right-wing paramilitaries and leftist guerrillas were at the height of their strength. Each assassinated the suspected supporters of the others across society, including in unions.

With help from the United States, in 2000 the Colombian military and the judicial system began to reassert themselves. Prosecuting cases referred by the unions themselves, the attorney general's office won its first conviction for the murder of a trade unionist in 2001. Last year, the office won nearly 40.

Of the 87 convictions won in union cases since 2001, almost all for murder, the ruling judges found that union activity was the motive in only 17. Even if you add the 16 cases in which motive was not established, the number doesn't reach half of the cases. The judges found that 15 of the murders were related to common crime, 10 to crimes of passion and 13 to membership in a guerrilla organization.

The unions don't dispute the numbers. Instead, they say the prosecutors and the courts are wasting time and being anti-union by seeking to establish motive—a novel position in legal jurisprudence.

The two main guerrilla groups have an avowed strategy of infiltrating unions, which attracts violence. About a third of the identified murderers of union members are leftist

guerrillas. Most of the rest are members of paramilitary groups—presumed to be behind two of the four trade unionist murders this month. The demobilization of most paramilitary groups, along with the prosecutions and government protection of union leaders, has contributed to the great drop in union murders.

President Álvaro Uribe, who has thin skin, can be unwisely provocative when responding to complaints from unions and human rights groups. Still, the level of unionization in Colombia is roughly equal to that in the United States and slightly below the level in the rest of Latin America. The government registered more than 120 new unions in 2006, the last year for which numbers are available. The International Labor Organization says union legal rights in Colombia meet its highest standards. Union leaders have been cabinet members, a governor and the mayor of Bogotá.

Delaying the approval of the trade agreement would be convenient for Democrats in Washington. American labor unions and human-rights groups have made common cause to oppose it this election year. The unions oppose the trade agreement for traditional protectionist reasons. Less understandable are the rights groups.

Human Rights Watch says that it has no position on trade but that it is using the withholding of approval to gain political leverage over the Colombian government. Conversely, they are harming Colombian workers in the process. The trade agreement would stimulate economic growth and help all Colombians.

[From the Washington Post, Mar. 31, 2008]

FREE COLOMBIA—A TRADE PACT EVERYONE CAN LOVE

Sometime after Congress returns from Easter recess this week, President Bush is likely to present the Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement for the approval of the House and Senate. As we have said, the proposed pact is good policy for both Colombia and the United States. Colombia has long enjoyed periodically renewable tariff-free access to the U.S. market; the agreement would make that permanent. In exchange, U.S. producers would, for the first time, get the same tariff-free deal when they export to Colombia. Meanwhile, the agreement contains labor and environmental protections much like those that Congress has already approved in a U.S.-Peru trade pact. A vote for the Colombia deal would show Latin America that a staunch U.S. ally will be rewarded for improving its human rights record and resisting the anti-American populism of Venezuela's Hugo Chávez.

Sending the agreement to the House of Representatives without the prior approval of Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) would be risky for the president; usually, the executive and legislative branches tee up such votes cooperatively. But months of Democratic resistance to the Colombia deal may have left Mr. Bush no choice. The agreement is being held hostage by members of the House (and Senate) who argue that Colombia—despite a dramatic drop in its overall murder toll under the leadership of President Álvaro Uribe—hasn't done enough to protect trade union activists or to punish past murders of labor leaders. Its a spurious complaint: Actually, in 2006, union members were slightly less likely than the average Colombian to be murdered. But the human rights issue has served as cover for many Democrats whose true objections are to free trade itself.

Once the agreement arrives on the Hill, Congress will have 90 legislative days to vote yes or no—no amendments and no filibusters

allowed, because special "fast track" rules apply. The Bush administration is betting that enough Democrats would support the pact to ensure its passage in the House, if it ever comes up for a vote. Of course, Ms. Pelosi could make an issue of the president's failure to get her approval to submit the pact and then could have her caucus shoot down the deal. But she could also engage the White House in serious negotiations. The president has signaled a willingness to consider reauthorizing aid for workers displaced by trade, legislation that is dear to the Democrats' labor constituency and that he has heretofore resisted.

Ms. Pelosi recently said that no Colombia deal could pass without trade adjustment assistance—without also mentioning the bogus trade unionists issue. Perhaps she is realizing that talking to Mr. Bush about swapping a Colombia vote for trade adjustment assistance might actually lead to a tangible accomplishment. At least we have to hope so.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement. I urge the Speaker to schedule a vote soon on this important agreement. Why? It is good for Illinois.

I represent an export dependent district. I have 8,000 union workers who make construction equipment; and, because of the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement, the 15 percent tariffs, taxes, the 15 percent on that construction equipment exported to Colombia are eliminated on day one. When you talk to agriculture, our farmers, those who raise corn and soybeans and livestock and specialty crops, they will tell you the U.S.-Colombia agreement is the best ever for agriculture. Clearly, States like Illinois win under the U.S.-Colombia Trade Agreement.

I would note that, overall, 80 percent of U.S. exports currently taxed will see those taxes waived and eliminated immediately upon implementation of the U.S.-Colombia Agreement. And facts have shown, if we have a trade agreement with a nation, exports grow 50 percent faster. So, it is good for Illinois and good for America.

Ladies and gentlemen, who is Colombia? Let me tell you, Colombia is America's best friend in Latin America. It is the oldest democracy in Latin America. It is America's most reliable partner in counterterrorism and in counternarcotics in this entire hemisphere. And today, President Uribe, who was democratically elected overwhelmingly with a mandate to bring security to the country, has been successful in driving the leftist narcotic-trafficking terrorist group, the FARC, to the fringes of Colombia and brought security to his country. As a result, he is the most popular elected president anywhere in the hemisphere, with an 80 percent approval rating.

I would note that 71 percent of Colombians in a recent opinion poll say that they believe that Colombia is more secure because of President Uribe, and 73 percent of Colombians say that President Uribe respects human rights. Homicides are down 40 percent, kidnappings are down 76 percent. And I would note, the murder

rate in Colombia today is lower than Washington, DC. It is safer to walk the streets of Colombia than it is our own Nation's capital. President Uribe has made tremendous progress in the last few years in reducing violence.

Now there are those who oppose the U.S.-Colombia Trade Agreement, and they say that President Uribe hasn't done enough. He hasn't done enough, particularly when it comes to violence against labor leaders. Let's look at the facts regarding President Uribe and the democratically-elected government of Colombia as it comes to violence against labor leaders as well as against other Colombian citizens.

President Uribe has increased by 75 percent in the last 2 years funding for the prosecution of those who commit violent acts. He has added over 2,100 new posts overall in the Prosecutor General's Office, adding 418 new prosecutors and 545 new investigators. He has made major changes. Colombia should be recognized and rewarded for the progress they have made. And, I would note that Carlos Rodriguez, president of the United Workers Confederation, has said about this effort: "Never in the history of Colombia have we achieved something so important."

When it comes specifically to labor leaders and labor activists, almost \$39 million was spent by the government of Colombia last year to provide body guards and protection for labor activists and labor leaders; 1,500 individuals, labor activists and labor leaders, participated and they are protected. And, I would note, that it has been successful. No labor leader has suffered a violent act or lost his life under this protection. Again, as the Washington Post noted this week, the murder rate for labor activists is actually lower than the national average. So he has made tremendous progress.

I would note, the International Labor Organization has removed Colombia from its labor watch list, even while Colombia has agreed to permanent ILO representation in Colombia. Most telling is 1,400 major labor union leaders have endorsed the Trade Agreement. The bottom line is, those who oppose this trade agreement always say they never do enough, but they never say what more can they do. Colombia deserves to be rewarded.

The U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement is good for America, it is good for Illinois, it is good for Colombia. They deserve a vote. Let's bring this agreement to the floor for an up-or-down vote soon.

TEACH YOUR CHILD—GO TO JAIL

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

Mr. POE. Mr. Speaker, homeschooling is an ever growing choice for parents in America. Parents teach their children at home for various reasons: They are concerned about

the quality of education, or the lack of it, in government schools; they don't approve of the public school curriculum; they want their kids to have a religious-based education, which is of course strictly forbidden in public schools; parents are concerned about school safety, especially in big urban schools; or, parents have special needs children that are not adequately served in public schools. Whatever the reason, many parents choose to homeschool.

Homeschooling is successful. Recent statistics show that homeschooled kids get higher test scores on ACT tests than non-homeschoolers. In the last 10 years, homeschooled children have scored higher every year on the ACT test than non-homeschoolers. I just recently appointed a homeschooler to the United States Air Force Academy, and his homeschooled education was superb.

But now, an appellate State court in California has ruled that, "Parents not only don't have a constitutional right to homeschool; parents that homeschool their children can face fines and go to jail," sayeth the all-powerful Judge Walter Croskey.

Where does the California court get such nonsense? Education has been the responsibility of parents since the beginning of time. Public education really is a relatively new concept. And now we have judges saying that parents are criminals unless their children are taught in government schools. This reminds me of my visit to the school system in the Soviet Union, which mandated all students should be indoctrinated with propaganda in the communist school system. This is Big Brother and government control at its worst. Can you imagine? A crime to teach your own children.

I have nothing against public schools or teachers. My mother was a public school teacher. All my daughters are teachers. I even taught in the State university. But no government has the right to tell parents how to educate their children, not even the government in California.

Parents and students need all education options. They need private school options, public school, religious school, or even home school. The real issue is not quality of education, but education freedom of choice by parents.

The judge says it is unconstitutional to homeschool your children. Well, Justice Croskey must not have ever read the U.S. Constitution. There is nothing written in the United States Constitution about giving government or judges the authority to control education. In fact, the word "education" is not even mentioned in the Constitution as a responsibility of government. The California court's ruling, in my opinion, is unconstitutional.

Education has generally been deemed a matter for local communities and parents. We have always believed that in this country. In fact, the Constitution in the Tenth Amendment states,