

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 homeschooled student 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,

"The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution nor prohibited by it to the states are reserved to the states respectfully or to the people."

And, I submit, "the people" in that phrase are parents that have the power, under our Constitution, to decide how to educate their children. It is their responsibility, their right, and their authority. After all, our children do not belong to the government and are not government possessions to be molded as the government or government judges deem fit.

The U.S. Constitution gives liberty to Americans, not enslavement to government. It is a parent's responsibility and right, not the government's, to raise our children. That includes how best to educate our children.

Living in a Nation that was founded on the inalienable right of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, means that parents have the right to raise and teach their children in a manner that is consistent with their beliefs and their principles, whether the California appellate judges like it or not.

And that's just the way it is.

REPORT ON RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 4847, UNITED STATES FIRE ADMINISTRATION REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2008

Ms. SUTTON, from the Committee on Rules, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 110-563) on the resolution (H. Res. 1071) providing for consideration of the bill (H.R. 4847) to reauthorize the United States Fire Administration, and for other purposes, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

HONORING FORMER REPRESENTATIVE BILL DICKINSON OF ALABAMA

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

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to rise and talk a little bit about a great former member who just passed away, Bill Dickinson of Alabama.

Mr. Speaker, and my colleagues, when I came in in 1981 and campaigned with Ronald Reagan in that great year in which we brought back a policy of peace through strength to the United States Government with respect to foreign policy, I was lucky enough to be placed on the Armed Services Committee and Bill Dickinson was the new ranking Republican member.

In those days, we had 1,000 petty officers a month leaving the U.S. Navy because they couldn't afford to take care of their families on the pay they were making; we had 50 percent of our aircraft or more which were not combat mission capable; we had what was called a hollow Army, that is, an Army

within which skilled people were leaving at an enormous rate. And, under Ronald Reagan's leadership and Bill Dickinson's hard work as the ranking member of the Armed Services Committee, along with lots of right-thinking Republicans and Democrats, we reversed that trend. We rebuilt national security.

I will always remember Bill working the budgets that Ronald Reagan brought in his early years, that 12.6 percent pay raise that we brought in early to start moving military families up to scale, the new equipment budgets that we brought in. The decision that we were going to stand up to the Soviet Union, and those decisions that the President made like the one that he made to move ground launch cruise missiles and Pershing 2s into Europe as the Russians were then ringing our allies with SS-20 missiles, and the fact that that helped to bring them to the table, helped to bring them to the point where they picked up the phone and said, "We want to talk."

I can remember Bill Dickinson standing tall and supporting the President very strongly when, in Central America, we saw the FMLN in El Salvador, the Communist group that was taking arms and materiel from the Soviet Union and trying to establish a Communist beachhead in El Salvador.

□ 1645

I remember the United States moving in to provide a shield around that fragile new government that was standing up, a democratically elected government. I remember Bill Dickinson, as a ranking member of the Armed Services Committee, spearheading support in Congress for that very important initiative.

Time after time, Bill Dickinson moved to the fore to make sure that we rebuilt America's forces, that we operated under a policy of peace through strength. And he was, indeed, Ronald Reagan's strongest ally with respect to national security in the House of Representatives.

Bill was a wonderful guy, a great guy with a sense of humor, a guy who was elected in a district in Alabama that until 1964 had not been Republican for 100 years. But he kept that district with a good sense of humor, a good sense of touch with the people, being approachable, and having a very strong, conservative peace-through-strength philosophy that resonated not only with his constituents but with the American people.

To Barbara and the children, we express our greatest condolences. We have lost a great former representative, and I have lost a great friend.

ENACT U.S.-COLOMBIA TRADE PROMOTION AGREEMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MARIO DIAZ-BALART) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MARIO DIAZ-BALART of Florida. Mr. Speaker, as Members of Congress, we are entrusted with the responsibility of keeping this Nation's economy strong by enacting policies which keep U.S. companies competitive in the global marketplace, to also support job growth at home, and ensure that the Federal Government operates effectively and efficiently.

Today, Mr. Speaker, the 9,000 U.S. companies who export industrial and consumer goods to our fourth largest trading partner in Latin America face tariffs of up to 35 percent in their exports while most Colombian products imported to the U.S. enter tariff free, tax free.

On February 27, just 5 weeks ago, the House agreed unanimously to extend existing unilateral trade preferences to Colombia and other Andean countries. In May 2007, House leadership publicly committed to passing a full bilateral trade agreement with Colombia, thereby allowing equal access to U.S. businesses in Colombia.

The Colombian government supports lowering these tariffs on U.S. goods, and many Members of Congress have shown time and time again that they support lowering barriers to trade with free nations. Yet the answer so far has been total inaction by the leadership. Inaction on the part of this Congress has levied an unnecessary burden and an uncalled for tax upon American companies, including 8,000 small- and medium-sized businesses, many of which operate in southern Florida.

Furthermore, it has been reported in the press that files recovered from a computer belonging to Raul Reyes, a leader within the terrorist rebel Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces, FARC, link the terrorist organization to the Venezuelan leadership in Caracas. In light of this news, Mr. Speaker, recent threats also made by the reckless and irresponsible leader, Hugo Chavez, and the ongoing attacks by the FARC, the United States needs to be supportive of the Colombian government, which stands up to anti-democratic and anti-American forces in the region.

It is time for the House leadership to follow through on their promises. Enactment of the U.S.-Colombia trade promotion agreement would show our strong support for this democracy while strengthening our own economy by creating greatest access for U.S. companies and creating more jobs in our communities here in the United States.

It would be negligent, irresponsible and unthinkable for this House to not immediately pass a free trade agreement with our closest ally in an otherwise volatile region.

Passage of this agreement will benefit businesses in our communities, create jobs for our constituents, and help strengthen our alliance with that democratically elected government and the people of Colombia. I call upon the House leadership to bring this agreement to the floor for a vote so we can