

dramatically for the better in Burma over the past year. After all, elections were held last fall, a “new” regime took office earlier this year, and Aung San Suu Kyi was freed. However, as our experience with Burma has taught us, things there usually require a closer look.

First, the November elections took place without the benefit of international election monitors, and no reputable observers viewed the elections as free or fair. This was in large part because the National League for Democracy—Suu Kyi’s party and the winner overwhelmingly of the last free elections in the country in 1990—was effectively banned by the junta and couldn’t participate in the election. There were restrictions placed on how other political parties could form and campaign. No criticism of the junta was permitted. And the results were unsurprising: the regime’s handpicked candidates won big and the democratic opposition was largely sidelined.

Second, the “new” regime appears to be essentially the junta with only the thinnest democratic veneer. The Constitution, which places great power in the hands of the military, cannot be amended without the blessing of the armed forces. Furthermore, those in parliament are limited in how they can criticize the regime.

The only legitimately good news was Suu Kyi’s release. Yet the extent of her freedom to travel remains an open question. Moreover, despite her release, nearly 2,000 other political prisoners remain behind bars in Burma; they are no better off than before. Neither are the hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced persons who are without a home due to the repressive policies of the junta.

That the political situation in Burma remains largely unchanged is also reflected in the defection this summer of two Burmese diplomats. One of them was the Burmese Deputy Chief of Mission here in Washington. He wrote a letter to the Secretary of State requesting political asylum and, according to press reports, in the letter, he stated as follows:

My efforts to improve bilateral ties have been continually rejected and resulted in my being deemed dangerous by the government. Because of this, I am also convinced and live in fear that I will be prosecuted for my actions, efforts, and beliefs when I return to Naypyidaw after completing my tour of duty here. The truth is that senior military officials are consolidating their grip on power and seeking to stamp out the voices of those seeking democracy, human rights, and individual liberties.

These words do not come from a Western government or an NGO; they come from a senior Burmese diplomat. His words make clear that the democratic trappings of the “new” regime are in many ways just a façade.

Finally, it is worth noting that there remain important security considerations that must be addressed before ending sanctions. The junta’s increasingly close bilateral military relation-

ship with North Korea, in particular, is a source of much concern.

I am hopeful that the time will soon come when sanctions against the Burmese government will no longer be needed; that like South Africa in the early 1990s, the people of Burma will be able to free themselves from their own government. However, as evidenced in the Deputy Chief of Mission’s letter, the Burmese junta appears to maintain an iron grip on its people, and continues to carry out a foreign policy that is inimical to U.S. interests. The United States must continue to deny this regime the legitimacy it craves by continuing sanctions, and these sanctions must remain in place until true democratic reform comes to the people of Burma.

HUNGER ACTION MONTH

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, this past month we recognized Hunger Action Month, a time for all Americans to focus on the problem of hunger in our communities. As we begin the month of October, we must remember that this is a year-round reality for many individuals and families around the country and that our efforts to eradicate this problem must continue.

Our Nation continues to face both a 9.1-percent unemployment rate, as well as a 15.1-percent poverty rate. Everyone has been touched in some way by this challenging economy. Many of our friends, neighbors and family members still might be struggling in ways that they never imagined with less money to spend and tough choices to make. Thankfully, there have been a number of community assistance organizations that have been able to step up and help out.

Many of these are local food banks and soup kitchens that are challenged to find resourceful ways to do more with less in order to provide services to those in need in their communities. One such organization that is still making a significant difference is the Arlington Food Assistance Center, AFAC. For over 20 years the AFAC has partnered with local churches, schools and social service agencies to assist over 1,200 families weekly with their basic food needs. Last year the AFAC was able to distribute over 2.3 million pounds of food directly to Arlington community residents. Community support of AFAC and thousands of organizations like it across the country is integral to their ability to provide the necessary services to those most in need. We must continue to give our support.

I hope my colleagues will join me in recognizing the Arlington Food Assistance Center and the many other organizations like it, as well as the importance of our commitment to addressing the problem of hunger across the Nation.

CUBA

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD an article highlighting the Castro regime’s continued abuse of the Cuban people as they organize efforts to create a freer Cuba. The people being held unjustly and abused in Cuban prisons—as well as those being intimidated and repressed outside of prison—need the continued support of America.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Wall Street Journal, Oct. 3, 2011]

AMERICA’S: CUBA’S REPRESSION ESCALATES

(By Mary Anastasia O’Grady)

Former New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson returned home from an attempted hostage-rescue mission to Cuba last month empty-handed and “still scratching [his] head” as to why the Castro regime double-crossed him. What is truly baffling is why Mr. Richardson expected anything different from a dictatorship operating in extreme-repression mode.

In a Sept. 14 interview with CNN’s Wolf Blitzer, Mr. Richardson said he had been invited to the island to discuss the release of U.S. Agency for International Development contractor Alan Gross. Mr. Gross was arrested in December 2009 and is serving a 15-year sentence.

Mr. Richardson admitted that he got stiffed by Cuba’s “foreign ministry, which a lot of the people there I know and have been friends” with. What he could not grasp is why those “friends”—a strange designation for individuals who might one day be hauled before an international human-rights tribunal—don’t appreciate the Obama administration’s outreach. Yes, they are “hardliners,” he admitted, but they ought to understand that the White House has been bending over backward to get along.

Actually they do understand, and that’s why they treated him so badly.

Mr. Richardson told Mr. Blitzer that he was “flabbergasted” when, after a “delightful” three-hour lunch discussing how U.S.-Cuba relations might be improved—including, he told me by phone Friday, the possibility of removing the country from the list of state sponsors of terrorism after the release of Mr. Gross—the foreign minister “slammed me three ways: one, no seeing Alan Gross; no getting him out; and no seeing Raul Castro.”

What happened was very predictable. The “loosened travel restrictions” and increased “remittances [from] Cuban-Americans” that Mr. Richardson cited as signs of Mr. Obama’s willingness to deal are read as weakness by the bullying regime. It has something, i.e., somebody, the U.S. wants back very badly, and the administration acts as if it is powerless. Why should Castro deal?

Mr. Richardson did even less for Cuba’s dissidents. One Richardson pearl of wisdom, shared on CNN, was that Cuba’s “human-rights situation has improved.” In fact, human rights in Cuba are rapidly deteriorating. To claim otherwise is to abandon the island’s brave democrats when they most need international solidarity.

Ask Sonia Garro, pictured in the nearby photo (See accompanying photo—WSJ October 3, 2011) . . . For years Ms. Garro has denounced the regime’s discrimination against Afro-Cubans. Despite her own poverty, in 2007 she created a recreation center in her home for poor, unsupervised children, according to a report by an independent Cuban

journalist. One of her goals: to get young girls out of prostitution. Ms. Garro is also a member of Ladies in Support, a group that pledges solidarity to the Ladies in White, which was founded by the wives, sisters and mothers of political prisoners in 2003 to work for their liberation.

In October 2010, Ms. Garro was detained by state security and held for seven hours. She emerged from the ordeal with a broken nose. Another woman taken into custody with Ms. Garro had her arm broken.

The nongovernmental organization Capitol Hill Cubans has reported that in the first 12 days of September, authorities detained 168 peaceful activists. These "express detentions" are designed to break up dissident gatherings, which risk spreading nonconformist behavior. Locking up offenders for long periods would be preferable, but the regime wants people like Mr. Richardson to go around saying that human rights have improved. The regime is also making greater use of civilian-clothed "rapid response" brigades that are trained, armed and organized to beat up democracy advocates.

Mr. Richardson told me he considers Cuba's record improved because 52 political prisoners were sent to Spain in 2010. Yet exiling promising opposition leadership hardly qualifies as a humanitarian gesture. Nor are gruesome Cuban prisons anything to ignore.

Last month in a speech in New York, one former prisoner, Fidel Suarez Cruz, described his seven years and seven months of solitary confinement, including two years and eight months in a cell with no windows, ventilation or artificial light. One favorite pastime of his torturers: Four military men would pick him up and then drop him on the floor. His testimony, posted on Capitol Hill Cubans website, is required viewing for anyone who doubts the evil nature of this regime.

Nevertheless, Cuba's dissidents remain relentless, and there are signs that the regime is giving up on the express-detention strategy. Fearless democracy advocate Sara Marta Fonseca and her husband Julio Leon Perez have been in jail since Sept. 24. Ms. Fonseca's son has seen her and says she is black and blue all over and has an injury to her spinal column. Word is the regime is preparing to charge the couple; 11 other dissidents are awaiting trial. Meanwhile, Yris Perez Aguilera, the wife of the prominent dissident Jorge Luis Garcia Perez "Antunez," and two peers were detained on Sept. 26. Their whereabouts are unknown.

Any hope of protecting these patriots lies in international condemnation. Mr. Richardson could help by returning to CNN to correct the record.

TRIBUTE TO MARY ELLEN NELSON

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, 18 years ago, Mary Ellen Nelson started in my Kalispell office. In that time, Mary Ellen earned the respect and admiration of her colleagues both in my offices across the State, in Washington, DC and with the Finance Committee. Staff always enjoyed getting the chance to talk with Mary Ellen and hear her words of wisdom. I have treasured her caring nature and thoughtful advice and am grateful for all her hard work over the years. It is important to note: my staff members don't just work for me—they work for all Montanans. Mary Ellen has served the young, the old, the successful, the downtrodden, and Montanans of all political stripes. It has been an honor to have her on staff and to work together for the State we cherish.

Working for VISTA is what brought Mary Ellen to Montana where she met and married her husband Ray of 34 years. A few years later they moved to Kalispell where she worked for the school system and the mentally disabled children of Flathead Valley before her work in the U.S. Senate. Mary Ellen's compassion to others resonates in her dedication to her family, community and the constituents of Montana. Mary Ellen has helped thousands of Montanans work their way through Social Security, Medicare, and other issues throughout the years. Her calm, nurturing character and commitment to helping others have benefitted thousands of Montanans throughout her 18 years of service.

A few years ago when Mary Ellen's two sons were graduating from college, I told her that graduations and weddings were important events and needed to be celebrated. The same is true of retirements. Mary Ellen will be enjoying her hours with her family, including her son Matthew in Kalispell, son George and daughter-in-law Monica in DC, her 90-year-old father, Leo Holland, and visiting her first grandchild Dominic who was born on Mary Ellen's birthday January 24 of this year. Mary Ellen, congratulations, good luck, and enjoy your retirement. Thank you for your many years of service in my office, the U.S. Senate, the community of Kalispell, and countless Montanans for your tireless work to help others. We are sure going to miss you, your talents, and your warm and accommodating personality.

Mary Ellen is proud of her Irish heritage so I would like to end with this Irish Retirement Blessing:

May you always have work for your hands to do.
May your pockets hold always a coin or two.
May the sun shine bright on your windowpane.
May the rainbow be certain to follow each rain.
May the hand of a friend always be near you.
And may God fill your heart with gladness to cheer you.

TRIBUTE TO COLONEL TRACEY L. WATKINS, USAF

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I wish to recognize the service of COL Tracey L. Watkins of the U.S. Air Force on the occasion of his reassignment from the Air Force Congressional Budget and Appropriations Liaison Office and to say hail and farewell.

Colonel Watkins graduated from the Citadel in 1991 and since then has served in a variety of comptroller assignments across the Air Force. He has held leadership positions at all field and staff levels, including assignments in personnel, logistics, and operational planning. Colonel Watkins' time in the Air Force has included three joint tours: on the Joint Staff, as part of Combined Joint Task Force 76 in Uzbekistan, and in the Multi National Corps in Iraq.

Colonel Watkins' experiences in those tours were a benefit when he assumed the directorship of the Air Force's Congressional Budget and Appropriations Liaison Office. In that role, Colonel Watkins directed all Air Force appropriations liaison work on the Hill, including arranging key engagements for Air Force senior leaders with Members of Congress and helping to prepare their testimony during Appropriations Committee hearings. In each of those engagements, Colonel Watkins served as the Air Force point man for working with the Congress on all budgetary and appropriations issues. His office also supports congressional delegation trips and Colonel Watkins accompanied me on an important trip to Russia.

I have been impressed with many of the staff that Colonel Watkins led during his tenure as Director of the Air Force Congressional Budget and Appropriations Liaison Office, which I find to be the mark of an outstanding leader and manager. I am sure that my colleagues join me in expressing our appreciation to Colonel Watkins for his service to the Air Force and to the Congress. On the occasion of his reassignment to command the Mission Support Group at Little Rock Air Force Base in Arkansas, I wish Colonel Watkins, his wife Kelly, and his children all the very best in the years to come.

TRIBUTE TO HOWARD FRANK MOSHER

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, one of the great treasures of Vermont is Howard Frank Mosher. Mr. Mosher is a writer who knows and understands Vermont, and in books like "Where The Rivers Flow North," he makes any Vermonter know they are home.

A recent article in The Burlington Free Press by Sally Pollak speaks to the man he is, and I would like to take this opportunity to share this with the Senate.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD, the article to which I referred.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Burlington Free Press]
ALL ROADS LEAD TO KINGDOM COUNTY
(By Sally Pollak)

(Vermont author Howard Frank Mosher has lived in the Northeast Kingdom since 1964 and the region is character-like in his books. Free Press Staff Writer Sally Pollak and Free Press photographer Glenn Russell spent a day traveling the roads in the north country with Mosher, listening to his stories and discovering his sense of place.)

IRASBURG—The tan Nissan rolling down the dirt road in Brownington came to a slow stop, and the man behind the wheel surveyed the shallows and grooves of mud in front of him. The place he wanted to go was on the far side of the mud pit, and up a small hill that curved out of sight.

Two men with trucks were on the other side of the mud ravine. The Nissan driver left his car to approach the men. I was in the