

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. ROYCE) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3654, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Speaker, I object to the vote on the ground that a quorum is not present and make the point of order that a quorum is not present.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

The point of no quorum is considered withdrawn.

SUPPORTING FREEDOM OF THE PRESS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 536) supporting freedom of the press in Latin America and the Caribbean and condemning violations of press freedom and violence against journalists, bloggers, and individuals exercising their right to freedom of speech, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

H. RES. 536

Whereas despite the strong tradition of independent and critical media in many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, journalists in some countries are becoming increasingly vulnerable to violence and government harassment;

Whereas, on July 29, 2015, the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee convened a hearing titled “Threats to Press Freedom in the Americas” and Carlos Lauria, Senior Americas Program Coordinator at the Committee to Protect Journalists stated that “Scores of journalists have been killed and disappeared. Media outlets have been bombed and forced into censorship. . . . Censorship due to violence in Latin America has reached one of its highest points since most of the region was dominated by military rule more than three decades ago.”;

Whereas in 2014, Cuban authorities detained 1,817 members of civil society, 31 of whom were independent journalists;

Whereas in Cuba, independent journalists face sustained harassment, including detention and physical abuse from the Castro regime;

Whereas in Ecuador, in September 2015, the government took steps to close the sole press freedom monitoring organization, Fundamedios, for exceeding its corporate charter, but the government relented in the face of international criticism and potential economic reprisals;

Whereas in the country, forced corrections by the government have become a means of institutional censorship;

Whereas according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, Mexico is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for the press;

Whereas in Mexico, over 50 journalists have been killed or have disappeared since 2007, at least 11 reporters have been killed

since 2011, 4 of them in direct reprisal for their work;

Whereas according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, at least 4 journalists have been killed in Brazil in 2015, many times after being tortured and having their bodies mutilated;

Whereas Evany José Metzker, a political blogger in the state of Minas Gerais who had been investigating a child prostitution ring, was found decapitated outside the town of Padre Paraíso;

Whereas according to the Organization of American States (OAS) 2014 Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human rights, journalists covering protests in Venezuela were subject to assaults, obstruction, detention, raids, threats, censorship orders, and confiscation or destruction of equipment;

Whereas, on April 21, 2015, a lawsuit within the 29th District Tribunal of the Metropolitan area of Caracas charged the journal *El Nacional* and its Chief Editor Miguel Henrique Otero for “reproducing false information” and was forced to flee Venezuela;

Whereas the Honduran national human rights commissioner reported that 8 journalists and social communicators were killed as of September, compared with 3 in 2013, and dozens of cases in which journalists reported being victims of threats and persecution;

Whereas according to the OAS 2014 Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights Members of the media and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) stated the press “self-censored” due to fear of reprisal from organized crime or corrupt government officials;

Whereas in Colombia, there were 98 incidents of violence and harassment against journalists, 30 were physically attacked, and 45 were victims of harassment or intimidation due to their reporting;

Whereas members of illegal armed groups sought to inhibit freedom of expression by intimidating, threatening, kidnapping, and killing journalists;

Whereas national and international NGOs reported that local media representatives regularly practiced self-censorship because of threats of violence from these groups;

Whereas according to the OAS 2014 Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human rights, throughout 2014, Guatemala presented accounts of cases of harassment and the filing of several criminal complaints against a newspaper that criticized the Administration;

Whereas according to the Department of State’s Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2014 in Nicaragua, the government continued to use direct and indirect means to pressure and seek to close independent radio stations, allegedly for political reasons;

Whereas according to the Department of State’s Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2014 in Argentina, a survey released of 830 journalists throughout the country indicated 53 percent of respondents worked for a media outlet that self-censored content; and

Whereas almost half the journalists surveyed said they self-censored in their reporting on the national government: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives—

(1) supports a free press in Latin America and the Caribbean and condemns violations of press freedom and violence against journalists;

(2) urges countries in the region to implement recommendations from the Organization of American States’ Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression to its Member States;

(3) urges countries in Latin America and the Caribbean to be vocal in condemning violations of press freedom, violence against journalists, and the culture of impunity that leads to self-censorship;

(4) urges countries in the Western Hemisphere to uphold the principles outlined in the Inter-American Democratic Charter and urges their neighbors in the region to stand by the charter they are a party to; and

(5) urges the United States Agency for International Development and the Department of State to assist, when appropriate, the media in closed societies to promote an open and free press.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. ROYCE) and the gentleman from New York (Mr. ENGEL) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and to include any extraneous material in the RECORD.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to bring forward this resolution, introduced by my friend and colleague, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. Sires), on the important issue of press freedom in the Western Hemisphere.

Freedom of the press is the cornerstone of democracy. It is our obligation to promote and protect this fundamental right, particularly here in our own hemisphere.

Undoubtedly, Mr. Speaker, we have seen a troubling erosion of these rights in several parts of the Western Hemisphere at the hands of authoritarian, populist leaders, as well as violence against journalists by transnational narcotics trafficking organizations.

In Ecuador, President Correa silences discourse and dissent by intimidating and censoring the media. Hefty fines are issued for any reporting unfavorable to him or his policies.

In Mexico, narcotics traffickers intimidate the press and violently target journalists to silence those journalists.

In Cuba, despite the administration’s naïve rapprochement, a lack of free expression is underscored by the continued political imprisonment of anyone who dares to speak or write against the Castro dictatorship.

This resolution is an important demonstration of our support for the fundamental right to freedom of speech and our belief that regional leaders in the Organization of American States need to do more to condemn what, in some parts of the region, has become the systemic violation of press freedom. The United States must stand with brave journalists who are on the front lines of exposing corruption in government.

Earlier this year, Chairman DUNCAN’s Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere held a hearing on threats to

press freedom in the Americas. One witness told the committee that there is now a growing regional trend of government persecution and harassment of journalists, as well as an increase in violent attacks carried out by state and nonstate actors with near complete immunity.

I applaud Mr. Sires and the chairman emeritus of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Ms. Ros-Lehtinen, for introducing this resolution and all who champion freedom of expression as a fundamental part of a vibrant, democratic tradition.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise in strong support of H. Res. 536.

I want to congratulate my friend from New Jersey (Mr. Sires), who is the driving force behind this resolution, and my friend from Florida (Ms. Ros-Lehtinen), who has cosponsored this resolution. The two of them have really worked very, very hard through the years to raise this issue, and it is good that we are taking up this measure now.

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Here in the United States we know that a free and open press is the cornerstone of a strong democracy. We count on the press to hold leaders accountable and shine a light on the challenges facing our country. The work of a free press goes hand in hand with the representative government we practice in this Chamber.

As government officials, we have tremendous respect for our friends in the so-called fourth estate. So it is especially troubling when we see governments right here in our hemisphere try to silence this critical institution.

On May 1, World Press Freedom Day, President Obama said “in too many places around the world, a free press is under attack by governments that want to avoid the truth or mistrust the ability of citizens to make their own decisions.”

Unfortunately, that threat to press freedom is particularly acute right here in our own hemisphere. That is why I am so glad, as I mentioned before, that my friends, Mr. Sires, ranking member of the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, and Ms. Ros-Lehtinen, the subcommittee's former chair, introduced this measure condemning violations of press freedom and violence against journalists in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Mr. Sires and Ms. Ros-Lehtinen are leaders on the Western Hemisphere in our Congress and are never shy to speak up when individuals' rights are in danger. I used to be the chairman of the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere; so, I have seen this problem firsthand.

Here in the Americas, leaders often speak out when electoral democracy is at risk. That is great. But, unfortunately, those leaders fall silent when it comes to the more subtle challenges to

democracy, particularly violations of press freedom.

We saw it earlier this year when the Ecuadorian Government threatened to close down a press freedom monitoring organization known as Fundamedios. Chairman Royce and I joined many in the international community in condemning this effort. Fortunately, President Correa relented in the face of international condemnation.

Still, attacks on press freedom in Ecuador are a daily problem, creating a hostile environment for journalists trying to do their jobs. A 2013 communications law put in place fines and sanctions for the press. So it is no surprise that Freedom House rated Ecuador's press as not free this year. The list goes on and on.

In Venezuela, journalists have been targeted by politically motivated lawsuits. That is why it is such a miracle, what we saw this past week or so with the Venezuelan elections.

Despite the harassment, despite the lack of press freedom, despite going after people who would raise the truth, the Venezuelan people weren't fooled and voted overwhelmingly against the current oppressive regime.

That is good. It is good to see. But we need to make sure that free press really exists not only in places like Venezuela, but in Cuba, where the government has rounded up and detained independent journalists just for reporting the reality on the ground. Just for reporting the truth in Cuba, you get rounded up and detained.

In Mexico, drug trafficking organizations have brutally murdered many of those who report on their violent activities. Just last week, the editor of a Mexican newspaper called *El Manana* explained to The Washington Post that submitting to drug traffickers' demands is the only way to stay alive. He said: “You do it or you die, and nobody wants to die. Self-censorship—that's our shield.” And in Colombia and Honduras, journalism remains a dangerous profession.

This resolution underscores these abuses and the scourge of violence against journalists. It reaffirms the important role a free press plays in open societies, and it urges these governments in the region to do much more to provide protection to those journalists under threat.

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this resolution. I again compliment Mr. Sires and Ms. Ros-Lehtinen.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Speaker, I yield 6 minutes to the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. Ros-Lehtinen), chair of the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the primary cosponsor of this resolution.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman of our committee, again, the gentleman from California (Mr. Royce), and the ranking member,

the gentleman from New York (Mr. Engel), for bringing this important resolution to the floor in such a speedy manner.

I want to thank my dear friend, my legislative brother, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. Sires), for bringing forward House Resolution 536, which is a resolution to support freedom of the press in Latin America and the Caribbean and condemning violations of press freedoms and violence against journalists, bloggers, and individuals who are exercising their right to freedom of speech. I am honored to be the Republican lead on Mr. Sires' resolution.

Basic freedoms are being threatened all over Latin America, Mr. Speaker, by rogue regimes that seek to quash dissenters in any way that they can.

Earlier this year we held a subcommittee hearing, as the chairman pointed out, on this very subject of the threat to press freedom. Carlos Ponce of Freedom House stated that, when it comes to press freedom, only three countries in Latin America were rated free by this organization.

Can you imagine that, Mr. Speaker? Out of all of the countries in Latin America, only three could be labeled as free when it comes to freedom of the press.

More and more, we see countries like Venezuela, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Cuba taking steps to muzzle broadcast and print media into submission, leaving journalists and editors no choice but to self-censor their very own content.

Venezuela's 2004 Ley de Responsabilidad Social en Radio y Television, or Law of Social Responsibility in Radio and Television, has provided the legal framework to quash and censor the press, and its provisions have been replicated by Ecuador and other countries in the region.

Due to the provisions in this law, television stations and newspapers have been bullied by the regime or forced to sell their outlets. In the case of RCTV, broadcasts were suspended by the Venezuelan regime.

Owners of Globovision and *El Universal*, both critical of the regime, were forced to sell their outlets to business interests with close ties to the regime.

Ecuador faces equally daunting challenges to press freedoms. A large number of journalists are being sued. Watchdogs such as Fundamedios are being harassed constantly. Newspapers such as *El Universo* are being fined for running articles that are not in agreement with the regime.

In Nicaragua, the Ortega regime has also restricted media outlets by making it difficult for journalists to operate. With the recent promulgation by the Law of Sovereign Security, it has nearly ensured a muzzle on all reporters.

Former President Cristina Kirchner of Argentina and her court often demonize journalists and charge popular media outlets, such as *El Grupo Clarin*

or the daily *Ultima Hora*, with inciting collective violence and terrorizing the population. These are actual charges.

Mexico, one of our closest allies in the region, is one of the most dangerous countries for journalists. This year alone, six journalists were killed in direct connection to their journalism work.

In my native country of Cuba, despite the misguided normalization effort by the Obama administration, the Castro regime continues to hold total control of information. There is no free press in Cuba. Foreign media outlets usually censor their own information because they don't want to be kicked out of the country.

Last week, Mr. Speaker, I had the honor of meeting a Cuban artist here in Washington, D.C., known as El Sexto, the sixth one. He was jailed for nearly a year for announcing that he would take part in a performance art that criticized the Communist regime leaders.

The mere announcement was enough to be jailed for almost a year. Citizen journalists who defy the Castro brothers on the island are regularly subject to death threats, arbitrary arrests, beatings, and torture by the repression apparatus of the regime.

Mr. Speaker, this is a critical time for basic freedoms in our hemisphere. Free and independent media are instruments to fight against the scornful, tyrannical regimes that plague our hemisphere today.

We in the United States must remain ever vigilant amongst our friends and foes in this key moment in history for press freedom and freedom of expression in our region.

This vote today, Mr. Speaker, overwhelmingly supporting efforts like the one spearheaded by our good friend, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. Sires), is a good place in which to start.

I thank the chairman, ranking member, and Mr. Sires for their work on this important topic.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. Sires), the author of this resolution, the ranking member of the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, a good friend, and a great member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Sires. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Chairman ROYCE, Ranking Member ENGEL, and all the staff for their support in promoting democratic values around the world and in their efforts to bring this resolution to the floor.

I also want to thank my good friend ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN for serving as the Republican lead on this legislation. I also want to recognize the leadership of my colleague, Chairman JEFF DUNCAN, on this issue.

Freedom of expression is the key to a thriving democracy. It is the number one tool to hold people and governments accountable for their actions. In

recent years, many organizations dedicated to freedom of speech and advancing civil societies have been trying to bring attention to the deterioration of press freedom in parts of the Western Hemisphere, specifically in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Cuba has consistently been characterized as having one of the most repressive media environments in the world, with the Castro brothers controlling all aspects of the print and electronic media.

Venezuela and Ecuador have harassed and fined the media, shut down press operations, and even physically attacked journalists who were trying to expose the state-sponsored crackdown against peaceful political dissenters.

In other countries, such as Mexico and Honduras, an increase in drug-related violence and worsening security situations have created a culture of impunity, allowing violence against journalists and the press to go unpunished.

As a child in Cuba, I witnessed the deterioration of democracy as the Castro regime took over the island and systematically destroyed all aspects of freedom of speech and expression. There is a strong connection between the country's democratic values and the freedom afforded to their press.

Working to preserve freedom of speech and pushing back against those who seek to quiet dissenters should be a top priority when engaging our neighbors in the region. That is why I introduced H. Res. 536, a resolution condemning violations of press freedom, violence against journalists, bloggers, and individuals exercising their right to freedom of speech.

This resolution condemns these violations and urges countries in the region to implement the recommendation of member states made by the Organization of American States, Office of Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression.

This resolution also urges our administration to assist the media in closed societies to promote a free press.

I urge my colleagues to support H. Res. 536 to help foster better protections for the press around our hemisphere.

Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, in closing, let me say that today we are talking about a particular challenge facing the Western Hemisphere. But let me say that we have seen a great deal in the last few weeks that we should be optimistic about.

As I mentioned before, for example, voters in Venezuela recently went to the ballot box to demand change. They did so in Argentina as well. So we see once again that, despite all of the challenges in the hemisphere, electoral democracy remains vibrant, but we have to keep working to keep it vibrant.

But, of course, elections alone are not enough. We need to work in partnership with our friends in the Americas to ensure that every country has a

robust democracy that includes a free and independent press. Most importantly, countries must guarantee the safety of journalists, especially as they courageously report in dangerous places.

I, again, thank Mr. Sires and Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN for introducing this important resolution. I urge my colleagues to support its passage.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleagues for their support of this resolution, as well as the chairman of the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee, Mr. DUNCAN, and, of course, the ranking member, Mr. Sires, the author of this resolution before us today. I thank them for the work they have done on the committee to bring attention to the troubling attacks on a free press that have plagued the Western Hemisphere.

Mr. Speaker, as Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1816: "Where the press is free, and every man able to read, all is safe."

This resolution is timely and important. I am proud of the work our committee has done to promote and defend freedom of the press, which is, of course, the cornerstone of democratic principles. The United States should—and must—continue to do more to help defend free expression across the Americas.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. Speaker, as a co-chair of the House Caucus on the Freedom of the Press, I strongly support H. Res. 536 and its condemnation of violations of press freedom and violence against journalists, bloggers, and individuals exercising their right to freedom of speech across Latin America and the Caribbean. Thomas Jefferson once said, "Our liberty depends on the freedom of the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost." Those words ring true not only for our nation, but for all nations and all people dedicated to the ideals of democracy and committed to a democratic system of government.

Whether through act and intimidation by the government or non-state actors, the voices of journalists across Latin America and the Caribbean—voices raised to speak out against corruption, abuses of power, and criminal activity—are being silenced at an alarming rate. This cannot be allowed to continue. I commend the House of Representatives and the sponsors of this legislation for drawing attention to this issue, and call on regional leaders to take all necessary steps to foster, protect, and defend the inherent right of their citizens to express themselves freely, publicly, and without fear of reprisal. Every time this right is violated, the foundations of society are weakened. We must all be vigilant and unrelenting in our support of free expression around the world.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. ROYCE) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H.R. 536, as amended.

