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House of Representatives

The House met at 12:30 p.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. SIMMONS).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,
March 11, 2003.

I hereby appoint the Honorable ROB SIMMONS to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

J. DENNIS HASTERT,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 7, 2003, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to not to exceed 30 minutes, and each Member, except the majority leader, the minority leader, or the minority whip, limited to not to exceed 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. BALLENGER) for 5 minutes.

COLOMBIAN COFFEE CRISIS

Mr. BALLENGER. Mr. Speaker, to most Americans coffee is nothing more than a morning pick-me-up, a drink over which to socialize, or an excuse to reacquaint ourselves with old friends or even to make new ones. But to Latin America, our neighbors down there, coffee is a way of life, a key to survival, and a hope for the future.

As many of my colleagues may know, coffee prices are at a record low. Latin American families who once made a good living at farming coffee are now

being forced to leave the farm to find other work. Oftentimes, that means risking life and limb to emigrate to the United States or to engage in the illegal production and trafficking of narcotics just to survive.

As a businessman, I fully comprehend the ebbs and flows of commodity trading and the effects that oversupply can have on a market. But there is much more to the current coffee situation than profit margins. Latin Americans produce the highest-quality coffee anywhere in the world, but they cannot make a living from it. Without immediate action, the consequences will be felt well beyond the coffee fields.

It is important to remember that democracy is still young and fragile in Latin America. Growing poverty and an increasing lack of real economic opportunities are now threatening the very democracy that thousands of Latin Americans have risked, and sometimes lost, their lives to establish. Over the years, I have worked with Latin leaders to promote economic opportunities that would strengthen new democracies and improve the lives of their citizens. The production of real quality coffee, for instance, once brought unheard of prosperity to many of the communities in Central and South America. But with the price of quality coffee falling to historic lows, the flood of lesser- and cheaper-quality coffee entering the global market, these very communities are now left destitute and questioning the benefits of democracy.

Last July, the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, which I chair, held a hearing on what some have termed the "coffee crisis." Some may refute the premise that there is such a crisis. The abandoned coffee plantations of El Salvador, Nicaragua, Colombia, and elsewhere, coupled with the thousands of people who are now out of work, tell a different story. There is a crisis.

During the hearing, witnesses testified that the trade in coffee is negatively affecting the local, national, and regional economies of our hemisphere. The overproduction of coffee is the result of unrestricted imports from places like Vietnam, where coffee is not a traditional crop and the farmers are heavily subsidized by the communist government. In a span of just a few years, Vietnam has emerged as the second leading exporter of coffee in the world. This oversupply has driven coffee prices to their lowest level in 30 years, to just a fraction of what they were a few years ago.

As a result of this hearing, the gentleman from California (Mr. FARR) and I cosponsored House Resolution 604, along with eight other Members of Congress. The resolution simply expresses the sense of the House that the United States should adopt a global strategy with coordinated activities in Latin America, Africa, and Asia to address the short-term humanitarian needs and long-term rural development needs of countries affected by the collapse of coffee prices. It encourages the President to explore measures to support and complement multilateral efforts to respond to the global coffee crisis. But more importantly, it urges the private sector coffee buyers and roasters to work with the United States to seek their own solution to the crisis which is economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable.

Numerous foreign firms are already helping farmers move away from drug production and improve the local economies. A French grocery company, CarreFour, entered into a contract with the Colombian organic and specialty coffee farmers to buy their coffee at slightly higher prices to be marketed in CarreFour stores. While I am not prone to say anything really nice about the French, especially recently, this is the type of corporate citizenship

□ 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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