

this month, and to pay tribute to the men and women of Poland who triumphed against repression, ultimately helping to bring democracy to a whole continent.

It is well known that in Poland the resistance to communism was particularly broad and deep—Stalin is reputed to have said that trying to impose communism on Poland was like trying to put a saddle on a cow. And so for several decades, Poles pushed back against the dictatorship that had been imposed on their exhausted country at the end of World War II. They pushed back in 1956 when workers from Poznan marched to Warsaw demanding “bread and freedom.” They pushed back through actions by students and intellectuals in 1964 and in 1968. And workers took to the streets again in Gdansk in 1970, including one young man named Lech Walesa. Each time the communist government managed to keep itself in power through a combination of force, threats of force, concessions, and by divisively playing one group of Poles off against another group. But never was the Poles’ desire for freedom extinguished or even diminished. Indeed it seemed to grow year by year.

In June 1979, when Pope John Paul II made his historic visit to Poland, he urged his countrymen and women: “Be not afraid.” A year later, in August 1980, the world stood in awe as shipyard workers struck at the Lenin factory in Gdansk, catapulting an unknown electrician, Lech Walesa, to the world stage. On August 31, Solidarity, the Warsaw Pact’s first truly independent trade union was born.

Solidarity, of course, was much more than a trade union. Strikers in Gdansk included in their original 21 demands not only improved working conditions, but respect for freedom of speech and the press, religious liberties, and freedom for political prisoners. Over the next year and a half, Solidarity’s card-carrying membership would grow to encompass nearly one-third of Poland’s working-age population, but its influence was beyond measure. Moreover, Solidarity ultimately brought together diverse segments of the population—workers and peasants, students and intellectuals—that had not previously worked together for a common cause. And in Solidarity, one could see a nation acting for a high moral purpose, informed by church and conscience, and by a tradition of Polish patriotism.

Inevitably, Solidarity was seen as a threat not only to the communist authorities in Warsaw, but to their taskmasters in Moscow, who escalated pressure on Warsaw to impose a crackdown that would silence the growing movement. At midnight, on December 13, 1981, martial law was declared, and a military government was established. Poland’s borders were sealed and its airspace closed. Phone service throughout the country was suspended. The routine sale of gasoline ceased. A curfew was established. Strikes, demonstrations, meetings, and public gatherings were banned. Solidarity was outlawed. Open censorship of mail was introduced and normal radio and television broadcasting was replaced with a loop of General Jaruzelski intoning that Poland was on the edge of an abyss. Tanks rumbled down Warsaw’s broad boulevards, and the whiff of tear gas tinged the air.

Approximately 10,000 people were arrested during the Martial Law period, and dozens of people were killed, most notoriously during the “pacification” of the Wujek Coal Mine. The

harshest controls were eased within weeks or months and martial law was formally lifted on July 22, 1983, but various forms of oppression continued for years. Many political prisoners were not released until the general amnesty in 1986, 5 years later.

Nevertheless, throughout the 1980s, and notwithstanding martial law, dissent in Poland burgeoned. By 1988, the ability of Solidarity to mount continuing strikes had forced the communist regime to blink—roundtable negotiations between the authorities and the opposition began in early 1988, and the Solidarity movement was formally re-legalized on April 7. When Solidarity’s official spokesman, Janusz Onyszkiewicz, testified before me at a Helsinki Commission hearing in September 1988, it was the first time that the Helsinki Commission received testimony from a Warsaw Pact dissident who was actually planning to return to his home country.

The roundtable talks eventually led to an agreement that 35% of the seats in parliament would be freely and fairly contested in the June 1989 elections, and all of the seats would be contested 4 years after that. The die, of course, was cast: when it came time to form a government, Solidarity put forward their own slate of candidates for prime minister. On August 19, 1989, Tadeusz Mazowiecki was elected Poland’s first non-Communist prime minister in 40 years. Poland rightly deserves credit for playing a critical role in advancing human rights and democratic forms throughout the entire Warsaw Pact region. In fact, Poland rightly deserves credit for helping to dissolve the Warsaw Pact.

We all remember the fall of the Berlin Wall—one of the greatest moments of the 20th century. Let’s not forget that, to a very great extent, the movement that brought down the Wall was “made in Poland,” or at least owes an immense debt to the Poles. For 45 years the Poles took the lead, within eastern Europe, in pushing back on communist rule, testing the limits of what the Soviets would tolerate. In other words, taking the risks. The rhythm of Polish uprisings and mass movements against communism is instructive: in 1944, the Nazis, with nearby Soviet forces blocking allied assistance, crushed the Warsaw Uprising; 12 years later, in 1956, the Poles were rioting again, and they wrung concessions out of the communist government; 12 years later, in 1968–1970, the same thing happened; then six later, in 1976; then 3 years later, in 1979 the visit of the new pope saw what amounted to massive demonstration of support for the Polish Catholic tradition which were at the same time demonstrations against communist tyranny; then 1 year later, in 1980, Solidarity was formed. But as the declaration of martial law demonstrated, the communists would only be able to exercise meaningful control through the use of an ultimately unsustainable degree of force. By the summer of 1989, it was clear that the Poles had stood down the Soviet Union. The communist parties of the eastern bloc were on their own, facing their peoples without Soviet military backing, setting the stage for them all to be swept from power.

So let’s remember that from the 1950s through the 1980s the Polish people, acting for high moral purposes—religious freedom, human rights, liberty, solidarity, patriotism—ran great risks—even the risk of another Russian invasion and they succeeded to the en-

during benefit not only of their own citizens, but all those around the globe who share those purposes.

At the end of this month, Poland will wrap up its tenure as the president of the European Union. It has come a very long way from the dark days of martial law and I am grateful that, as the United States seeks to promote democracy and human rights around the globe, Poland stands beside us as a leader in this effort.

THE KINGDOM OF MOROCCO

HON. ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, December 19, 2011

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, the Kingdom of Morocco is an important strategic partner, and I support its continuing reform efforts to make it a more democratic and prosperous nation. Last month’s elections in Morocco were another important step toward building a more democratic and inclusive country. The level of participation in the election of a new parliament demonstrates popular support for this reform agenda.

I support the democratic aspirations of the Moroccan people and encourage its new parliament and government to follow through on constitutional and other reforms to protect fundamental freedoms and human rights.

Additionally, the U.S. must continue to seek a fair, just, and enduring solution to the Western Sahara in order to promote regional integration and protect U.S. security interests in the region.

HONORING THE LIFE OF RON LYLE

HON. DIANA DeGETTE

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, December 19, 2011

Ms. DeGETTE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Ron Lyle, a Colorado resident and professional boxer who passed away late last month.

In Colorado’s surprisingly rich boxing history, Lyle stands alongside names like Jack Dempsey and Sonny Liston not only for his success in the ring but for his commitment to giving back to his community after retirement.

His story is one of redemption. Born into a family of 19 children in a downtrodden area of Northeast Denver, Lyle dropped out of school at age 19 and was subsequently convicted of second-degree murder in the death of a local gang-rival. Lyle, who had always been an impressive athlete growing up, learned to box in prison, and was pardoned 7½ years later by Colorado Gov. John Love.

Upon his release, Lyle pursued a career in boxing, winning the National Amateur Union heavyweight championship at age 28 before turning pro at the relatively old age of 29. He won his first 19 bouts, including an impressive 17 of them by KO.

As Lyle’s professional boxing career came of age, it did so during the golden-era for heavyweight fighting. The mid-1970’s was the time of Muhammad Ali, George Foreman, and