



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 114th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 161

WASHINGTON, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2015

No. 140

House of Representatives

The House met at noon and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. DENHAM).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,
September 28, 2015.

I hereby appoint the Honorable JEFF DENHAM to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

JOHN A. BOEHNER,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 6, 2015, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 1 hour and each Member other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip limited to 5 minutes, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 1:50 p.m.

HONDURAS MUST PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS, VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MCGOVERN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, last week I joined a fact-finding delegation to Honduras led by WOLA, the Washington Office on Latin America. We looked at the problem of violence and the lack of opportunity in order to understand why families and young people continue to flee the country. We wanted to learn what the Honduran

Government and people were doing in response to the problems that confront their country and how the United States might help. We met with families, young people, and community leaders in several marginal and violent communities, including those who benefit from programs at Casa Alianza.

The delegation also visited an innovative USAID-sponsored violence prevention program. It not only offers programs for young people in a poor and dangerous neighborhood, but brings together community leaders and local institutions to tackle local problems. By strengthening local leaders and groups and working with trained and vetted local police, crime levels have dropped and new opportunities for youth have been created. These are hopeful results for a community that 1 year ago was under siege by violent criminal actors.

We also met with many NGOs, human rights defenders, and international organizations to understand the intertwined problems of human rights, Democratic governance, and corruption. We had substantial conversations with Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez and met with our Ambassador, James Nealon, and his team, and I am grateful for how generous they were with their time.

I would like to share with my colleagues a few thoughts and conclusions from this trip.

First, I have no doubt that violence or lack of opportunity are driving families and young people to flee Honduras. I saw the marginal communities and heard the stories from families about the problems young people face. The best thing we can do is support efforts that break the cycle of violence and help build opportunities for youth in Honduras and elsewhere in Central America. At Casa Alianza and the USAID project, we saw the kind of programs that actually make a difference. That is where we should be directing our assistance.

Additionally, I also heard how long-term drought is exacerbating hunger, malnutrition, and the loss of livelihoods in rural central Honduras and igniting a new wave of migration.

Second, I heard from returned migrants and the families of migrants, including those whose loved ones have disappeared and never been heard from again. Migrants face abuse as they travel. They are extorted by authorities in Mexico and sometimes Guatemala and robbed or kidnapped and held for ransom by criminal groups. Young women run the risk of being trafficked and forced into prostitution.

We heard from returned migrants, especially those who had been stopped in Mexico, about the return journey and the lack of services at the El Corinto border crossing. We met migrants who had fled gang violence only to be forced to return to the same dangers.

I was moved by many of these stories. Migrants, even those traveling without legal documents, have basic rights, and we should be working with the Governments of Mexico and Honduras to ensure that they get decent treatment, access to needed services, and the protection they deserve.

Third, human rights abuses continue to be a serious problem in Honduras. Longtime human rights defenders, journalists, and gay, lesbian, and transgender activists described ongoing threats, attacks, and even assassinations, and the response by the police and the attorney general has not improved. In fact, a U.S.-supported special investigative unit that was supposed to focus on attacks on the LGBT community, journalists, and others has investigated even fewer cases this year than last.

I am troubled by the government's focus on special military police units, whose human rights record isn't good. I support the U.S. decision not to provide aid to the military police. Instead, the Honduran Government needs to

□ 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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