

PROBLEMS IN PANAMA

HON. ENI F.H. FALEOMAVAEGA

OF AMERICAN SAMOA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 30, 1999

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform our colleagues and our great Nation of important, recent developments in Latin America.

As you may be aware, Mr. Speaker, the country of Panama held its elections on May 2, 1999, which resulted in the selection of Panama's first female president, the Honorable Mireya Moscoso. President-elect Moscoso will be inaugurated into office this September 1st.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very positive development in Panama's progression to true democratic governance, for which the good people of that nation should be deeply congratulated. However, Mr. Speaker, the good news is overshadowed by the fact that the influence and policies of Panama's current president, Ernesto Perez Balladares, will likely continue for some time to control key government agencies.

Mr. Speaker, I find it troubling that Mr. Balladares wields a shadowy influence over the Moscoso administration through his control of political appointees he has selected for critical positions in the government—appointees whose terms of office will continue long after Mr. Balladares has stepped down as Panama's President.

Mr. Speaker, our colleagues should understand this is crucial because the recent election results are a positive sign that may significantly influence the future course of U.S.-Panamanian relations as Washington enters a critical time, the final transitional period for relinquishing control over the Panama Canal.

Mr. Speaker, President-elect Moscoso should be allowed to represent the will of the good people of Panama, unhindered by political handcuffs from prior administrations.

On that subject, Mr. Speaker, I recommend the following research memorandum which was authored by Dr. Brittmarie Janson Perez, a Panamanian anthropologist who is a fellow at the Institute of Latin American Studies at the University of Texas.

Dr. Perez also holds a senior research fellowship at the prestigious Council of Hemispheric Affairs (COHA), which is based in Washington under the leadership of Director Larry Birns, a respected, longtime advocate for democracy and human rights in Latin America. The attached article represents an updated version of Dr. Perez' work, which originally appeared in COHA's biweekly publication, the Washington Report on the Hemisphere.

Mr. Speaker, I urge our colleagues to read this timely article which addresses the need to observe upcoming events in Panama to ensure that the Moscoso administration is able to constructively impact the direction in which Panama develops, despite strong and likely non-productive opposition from pro-Perez Balladares partisans.

PANAMA ELECTIONS DO NOT SEND A CLEAR SIGNAL

(By Dr. Brittmarie Janson Pérez)

A few days before Panama's May 2 presidential elections, a cartoon in a local newspaper depicted President Ernesto Pérez Balladares squirming on a throne and moaning, "Nobody is looking at me." On election day, the man whose regime has been labeled a "civilian dictatorship," tried to steal the limelight by telling the French news agency AFP that he wanted to be president again. However, his ambitions were destined to be postponed for at least 10 years when Pérez Balladares' move amending the constitution which would allow him to immediately run again, was resoundingly defeated in a referendum last year.

Nevertheless, he will cast a long shadow on the administration of president-elect Mireya Moscoso, the victorious opposition candidate. Through his appointees, known for their eagerness to comply with his wishes, Pérez Balladares, on a de facto basis, will be able to control the Supreme Court, the Attorney General's office, the Electoral Tribunal and the Technical Judicial Police during the Moscoso administration. To make matters worse, thanks to millions of dollars supplied by his regime over the past five years to legislators of ruling Revolutionary Democratic (PRD) to spend in their respective districts, Pérez Balladares' party has retained its majority in the National Assembly.

PRESENT ECONOMIC SITUATION

The lame duck leader's ongoing influence within the government structure could bode no good for any hopes of the new leadership to blunt the costly neoliberal reforms he vigorously implemented while in power. As elsewhere in the hemisphere, economic globalization has tended to benefit foreign investors and the local elite, but does not appear to be arresting the impoverishment of the rural campesinos as well as the urban lower and middle sectors. For example, while non-traditional agricultural exports such as melons and watermelons was increasing, the market for local beef, potatoes, vegetables and other traditional products was shrinking due to cheap competitive imports. The power of labor unions was also being seriously undercut by restrictive reforms enacted by Pérez Balladares. His privatization of the state-run telephone company resulted in higher rates for the lower and middle urban sectors, which has caused an appreciable hardship on their lifestyle.

In the recent electoral campaign, expectations were raised that the worst effects of Pérez Balladares' policies could be remedied at the polls. All three presidential candidates—Moscoso as head of the Amulfiista Party in the Union for Panama coalition; Martin Torrijos, the son of the late authoritarian ruler, who became the PRD candidate in the New Nation coalition after Pérez Balladares' referendum bid to allow him to run again had failed; and Alberto Vallarino, a banker who split from the Amulfiista Party and formed the Opposition Action coalition with the support of the Christian Democrats—addressed economic issues from different perspectives, and made numerous promises aimed at ending the dreary status quo.

Already educators are warning Moscoso that if she now decides to implement policies that are harmful to the poor (who made up the bulk of her supporters), she can expect street protests once she is inaugurated. Yet, Moscow's power to implement important

economic pallatives is limited by overseas accords signed by Pérez Balladares with the international lending agencies. Also, prospective social investments by her administration likely have been jeopardized due to the legacy of profligate spending by Pérez Balladares in order to curry political favor. Her power to govern, even to maintain fundamental public order, will be restricted by his lingering influence over critical government institutions whose proper functioning could have made a difference.

DIVIDING UP THE SPOILS

Pérez Balladares' inaugural speech, which contained promises of austerity in public spending and transparency in government were given short shrift, eventually producing widespread mistrust of him among the citizenry, who nicknamed him "Pinocchio." He had resurrected Manuel Noriega's discredited political vehicle, the PRD, with the aid of some of the more notorious members of the now Miami-jailed dictator's coterie. Upon taking office in 1994, Pérez Balladares pardoned hundreds of PRD members and military personnel who were facing charges of murder, torture, and embezzling state funds during the Noriega era. Some individuals were even appointed to his cabinet. He also made questionable appointments to the boards of independent government agencies, including the Panama Canal Authority (ACP) and the Administration of the Inter-oceanic Region (ARI), the last-named body using entrusted with the disposition of canal properties transferred to Panama as the U.S. relinquishes control over the facility.

Pérez Balladares is particularly vulnerable to accusations of malfeasance regarding the process used to dispose of former canal properties. Thanks to his party's legislative steamroller, he was able to change the ARI's charter, stripping the institution of its all-important independence. Increasing the ARI's board of directors to his personal satisfaction, Pérez Balladares ousted an ARI administrator known for his honesty and firm hand, and Nicolás Ardito Baletta, a highly controversial World Bank official who was "elected" president of Panama through a Noriega-orchestrated electoral fraud in 1984. In this way, he was able to obtain oversight of the transfer of the "treasure of Panama," the properties, installations and land adjacent to the Canal, whose value has been conservatively estimated at over \$4 billion by the U.S. ambassador to Panama.

Nevertheless, it is unlikely that he or his agents will be held accountable for their questionable actions involving numerous allegations of moral turpitude. On the contrary, the institutions and offices over which Pérez Balladares and his party will continue to exercise influence, likely will be used to harass the president-elect at every turn.

CHANGES TO BE PURSUED UNDER THE NEW GOVERNMENT

There is a widespread clamor in Panama to significantly alter or replace the 1972 Constitution imposed during the dictatorship of Gen. Torrijos, and amended under the aegis of the two military leaders who followed him, Generals Rubén D. Paredes and Manuel Noriega. Critics charge that it grants excessive powers to the executive branch at the expense of the legislature. Paradoxically, the PRD's predictably obstructionist legislative majority will oblige the president-elect to renege on her campaign promise to democratize Panama through giving more power to the national assembly. Observers note that if she does not make ample use of the range of powers with which the military dictatorships

purposely endowed the executive branch, she will, in effect, be unable to govern the country.

President-elect Moscoso has outgrown the charges made against her of being a decorative figure who inherited a titular role in the party because of her late husband, Pres. Arnulfo Arias. This image along with other factors marred her prospects in the 1994 presidential campaign, which she lost to Pérez Balladares. Since then, she has made herself known throughout Panama by waging a tireless grassroots campaign, touring city and countryside to keep in touch with Panamanians of all stations. She proved her grit in intra-party squabbles when she snuffed out Alberto Vallarino's 1998 challenge her rule in her party's presidential primaries.

It is unfair to her and the Panamanian people that the country is almost doomed to remain a victim of the baleful and corrupt legacies of past dictatorships, and that Pérez Balladares and his PRD could jeopardize the administrative of the first woman president of Panama, who will also assume, in the name of her country, responsibilities of running the Panama Canal.

CELEBRATING THE RICH HISTORY OF NORTHPORT, MICHIGAN

HON. BART STUPAK

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 30, 1999

Mr. STUPAK. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to call your attention to the small community of Northport, a unique and rustic village on the beautiful Leelanau Peninsula in northwestern Lower Michigan. This richly diverse community, which draws its heritage from Native Americans and many other cultures, is currently celebrating its 150th birthday with a schedule of festivities that will last more than a month.

The celebration began on June 11 with a reenactment of the event that would lead to the creation of the village, the 1849 landing of Rev. George and Arvilla Smith, accompanied by Chief Peter Wakazoo and more than 40 families, most of them Native American.

As local lore relates, the town experienced a population boom in the mid-1800s after Deacon Joseph Dame wrote to the New York Tribune, extolling the benefits of the area. By 1859, according to the Sesquicentennial brochure, "Northport was the largest community in northwest Michigan, with 400 residents, two wharfs, five general stores, three hotels, several saloons, a sawmill and the first organized school district in Leelanau County."

As part of the festivities, residents and visitors can take a walking tour of the community, viewing the homes of early settlers whose lives were intertwined with Northport's 15 decades of history. Typical of such homes is that of the Eli Bordeaux family, which was on its way to Frankfort, Mich., by boat in 1867 when a storm forced them to take shelter in the Northport Harbor. As the guide books relate, family members liked what they saw and decided to stay. Eli, a farmer, built the home, which remains today.

This story and this home, Mr. Speaker, are just a small part of the rich heritage of the community represented in this walking tour.

Many other events, including an original drama, a powwow presented by the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, and an ongoing exhibit of community artifacts in a rehabilitated civic building are just part of the many weeks' activities.

When communities like Northport hold such celebrations, they certainly have in mind a goal of promoting the event to attract visitors, many of them perhaps visiting for the first time. Northport's events, however, are a true celebration for the residents themselves of a rich and unique heritage on a peninsula whose name means "delight of life." The name reflects not only the picturesque community and the surrounding area, but also the wonderfully moderated temperatures caused by the surrounding water. In fact, despite its location more than halfway to the North Pole, both tourism and fruit production are vital parts of the area's economy.

Mr. Speaker, I ask you and my House colleagues to join me in congratulating this special community in my district, the 1st Congressional District of Michigan, and in wishing its residents joy in their celebration and a future that continues rich in those intangibles that have created its wonderful quality of life.

IN RECOGNITION OF WILLIE LEE GLASS

HON. RALPH M. HALL

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 30, 1999

Mr. HALL of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a truly fine American—Mrs. Willie Lee Glass of Tyler, TX—who died May 2, 1999. In honor of her tireless efforts in the East Texas area, Mrs. Glass received many awards and accolades including, the People of Vision award and induction into the Texas Women's Hall of Fame.

Mrs. Glass was born August 24, 1910, in Nacogdoches, TX, to the late E.J. and Mary Campbell, both educators. She left Nacogdoches to attend Prairie View A&M and later received her master's degree from Iowa State. As a result of her strong family background in education, Willie returned to East Texas to serve as a homemaking consultant for the Texas Education Agency. She was also an active member of the Texas College Board of Trustees, the American Red Cross, the University of Texas at Tyler Foundation, and the Stephen F. Austin University Foundation. She was presented numerous tributes from the people of East Texas such as induction into the Nacogdoches Heritage Festival Hall of Fame and recognition as a Philanthropy Day Awards Outstanding Volunteer honoree.

Mrs. Glass was preceded in death by her husband, Dr. D.R. Glass, a 30-year president of Texas College. They were both members of the St. Paul CME Church. Willie's passion for education still runs deep even after her death, as a memorial scholarship has recently been established in her name at Texas College.

Mr. Speaker, as we adjourn today, let us do so in honor and in respect for this truly outstanding American—Mrs. Willie Lee Glass.

HONORING BRUNDIDGE VFW POST 7055 FOR EXEMPLARY SERVICE TO VETERANS

HON. TERRY EVERETT

OF ALABAMA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 30, 1999

Mr. EVERETT. Mr. Speaker, I would like to spotlight public service efforts of a veterans organization in my Southeast Alabama congressional district which I feel are truly exemplary.

Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7055 in Brundidge, Alabama has volunteered its time, talents and resources to construct a fitting memorial on the grave site of a deceased veteran renowned in life for his generosity and selflessness.

When the members of VFW Post 7055 learned that the grave site of former veteran and Presidential "Point of Light," J.D. Williams, was largely ignored, they sprang into action.

To honor the late veteran who before had spent decades selflessly decorating the graves of other veterans, VFW Post 7055 placed new coping and chipped marble on his humble Pike County, Alabama grave site and topped it off with a permanent American flag pole.

Their future plans include adding a bronze plaque to honor the memory of this remarkable veteran who was known for decorating at his own expense literally thousands of Southeast Alabama veteran graves with flags and white wooden crosses.

The late J.D. Williams' selflessness earned him national recognition some ten years ago as one of President George Bush's "Points of Light." He passed away in July of 1994 and was buried in Union Hill Cemetery near Troy, Alabama.

According to a recent article in The Pike County News, "the Brundidge VFW Post has made it a perpetual organizational project to upgrade, beautify and maintain Mr. Williams' grave site."

I join the U.S. House of Representatives in commending the membership of the Brundidge, Alabama VFW Post 7055 for their generosity and patriotism.

RECOGNIZING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF NACOGDOCHES COUNTY ELECTED OFFICIALS

HON. JIM TURNER

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 30, 1999

Mr. TURNER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of three extraordinary East Texans: Robert Spencer, Dorothy Tigner and Eddie Upshaw, all elected law officials in Nacogdoches County which I represent as part of Texas' Second Congressional District.

In an age where community action and politics are often, unfortunately, viewed with an indifferent or cynical eye, it is both uplifting and inspiring to encounter instances where public servants, through their professional efforts in and for the community, earn for themselves