

"It's ironic that in the quest for a color-blind society, some people want us to keep track of people by race," said Jim Pasco, executive director of the Fraternal Order of Police, the nation's largest police labor organization, with 277,000 members. "We're opposed to any kind of racial tabulation," he said, opposing proposals to accumulate data on police brutality cases.

Pasco said that police brutality hasn't been increasing. He notes the number of federal prosecutions of abusive cops has stayed at about 30 a year while the number of officers has sharply increased.

Available information hints that along with Boston, the police departments of Minneapolis and San Francisco have done the best jobs in curbing such abuses, according to a study last year of 14 cities by Human Rights Watch, an international human rights organization.

New York, Washington, D.C., and New Orleans appear to have the most serious problems of abusive officers on their forces, according to the report.

Los Angeles, where the Rodney King police beating led to riots, was judged to be "slowly on the mend."

Allyson Collins, the report's author, said the FBI, U.S. attorneys and Justice Department all have some information that could shed light.

"Bits and pieces of information are scattered everywhere," Collins said. "It's not a priority until we get some high-profile case that gets everyone talking and then the public is lulled back to sleep on the topic."

INTRODUCTION OF H.R. 1625—THE HUMAN RIGHTS INFORMATION ACT

HON. TOM LANTOS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 13, 1999

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, recently I introduced in the House The Human Rights Information Act (H.R. 1625), and joining me as the principal cosponsor of this bill was Congresswoman CONNIE MORELLA, our distinguished Republican Colleague from the State of Maryland. Our legislation has already found strong bipartisan support with over 50 of our distinguished colleagues joining as original cosponsors of this bill. These men and women are leading voices in the defense of human rights throughout the world, and recently many of them joined me at a press conference announcing the introduction of this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation is similar to legislation which I introduced in the last Congress with the cosponsorship of Congresswoman MORELLA. Our bill—H.R. 2635 of the 105th Congress—was considered and favorably reported by the Subcommittee on Government Management, Information, and Technology of the Committee on Government Reform in the last Congress. I want to commend our colleague, Congressman STEPHEN HORN, who chairs that Subcommittee, for his thoughtful consideration of the legislation last year. I also want to thank Congressman DENNIS KUCINICH, who served as Ranking Democratic Member of the Subcommittee in the last Congress, for his help in the consideration of the legislation last year.

Mr. Speaker, three simple principles are at the heart of the Human Rights Information Act.

First, it is a fundamental obligation of our government to support and protect human rights and democracy. This principle is central to our democratic system of government. The constitutional codification of our commitment to human rights, our Bill of Rights, not only has domestic implications for Americans, but it also has inspired and encouraged countries around the world in their own quest for freedom, democracy, and human rights. Successful American Administrations have recognized our nation's strong national commitment to human rights as a guiding principle and as one of the highest obligations of our nation's foreign policy. The United States has freely accepted our obligation to protect human rights under international law by signing and ratifying various international human rights treaties and covenants. It is also fundamental to any democratic system of government that the public be fully informed about policies directly affecting these most fundamental rights in order for the people to make meaningful decisions with regard to their government and to participate fully in the democratic process. The timely declassification of documents pertaining to human rights violations abroad, therefore, ought to be a paramount obligation of any U.S. government agency.

Second, our nation's commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights and democracy around the world has led us to make tremendous diplomatic, economic, and military efforts to end systematic human rights violations abroad. The United States government's efforts are supported by numerous American and foreign non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the promotion of human rights and democracy. These efforts would be in vain if we do not do all we can to uncover and legally prosecute those who commit human rights abuses with impunity. Only full investigation of human rights abuses in these areas can really bring about the full accountability needed to develop respect for human rights and to rebuild a peaceful and reconciled civil society after civil conflict.

Third, democracy and human rights can flourish only where information is fully available, and information is essential to the rule of law. Without information and the rule of law, we will see human rights violations and the erosion of democracy. Even in countries where progress has been made, there is danger of regression if full information and the rule of law are not scrupulously enforced.

A country currently facing this danger is Guatemala. As my colleagues may know, just a few weeks ago, three gunmen entered the house of Ronald Ochaeta, the director of the Catholic Church's human rights office. They put a gun to the head of his 4-year old son and left a box with bricks behind. The bricks are an allusion to the assassination of Bishop Gerardi a year ago, who was killed by a brick only days after the Bishop issued his report on human rights violations during the period of the Guatemalan Civil War. The investigation of the Bishop's death has not yet produced any results. In Guatemala recently, President Clinton gave his word that the United States will never forget its obligation to those people whose lives have been affected by our policies, and who are now rightfully seeking the most basic of all information which was not included in

the recently released report by the Guatemalan Truth Commission—What happened to their relatives and loved ones, where are their bodies, and which individuals were responsible for the disappearances and deaths?

Mr. Speaker, let me briefly outline the provisions of H.R. 1625:

Our bill specifies that 120 days after enactment of the legislation, each U.S. government agency shall identify, review and organize all records and documents relating to human rights abuses in Guatemala and Honduras after 1944. The provisions of the legislation would also apply to human rights violations in other areas of the world, but because of the particularly serious problems of Guatemala and Honduras and the reconciliation efforts currently under way there, these two countries these are given particular focus in the bill.

The legislation would apply the declassification procedures of the previously enacted JFK Assassination Records Act to human rights records. This will assure that legitimate National Security concerns are protected, but at the same time it will also assure that human rights documents are given special priority. In order to assure that records are not withheld for trivial reasons, those records which agencies seek to withhold would be reviewed by the Interagency Security Classification Appeals Panel (an organization which was established by Presidential Executive Order 12958) or any entity subsequently established which fulfills the same functions of the Appeals Panel. Our legislation would add two new members to the Appeals Panel (or the entity that replaces it). These two positions would be filled by the President with human rights experts who meet the security requirements for membership on the panel. The President would be required to invite recommendations for these positions from the human rights community.

Mr. Speaker, our legislation is an effort to assure that human rights records and documents—which are essential for the identification and prosecution of individuals involved in gross human rights abuses—are made available to other countries in their pursuit and punishment of human rights violators. At the same time the legislation recognizes and carefully balances the national security and intelligence needs of the United States.

I invite our colleagues in the House to join as cosponsors of this important piece of legislation.

THE TAX FAIRNESS FOR THE STATES ACT OF 1999

HON. PETER J. VISCLOSKEY

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 13, 1999

Mr. VISCLOSKEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of bipartisan legislation that I am introducing with Representatives ISTOOK, SANDLIN, LAHOOD, and 17 of my colleagues. The Tax Fairness for the States Act of 1999 will restore millions of dollars of lost revenue for the states, and establish an incentive program for those Native Americans who play by the rules.