CONSTITUTIONAL IMPASSE CONTINUES IN BELARUS

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
OF NEW JERSEY
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Tuesday, May 25, 1999

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey, Mr. Speaker, on May 16, the alternative Presidential election concluded in Belarus within the timeframe envisioned by the legitimate 1994 Constitution. While the opposition Central Election Commission (CEC) concluded that the final results of the voting were invalid because of various violations deriving from the impediments placed by Belarusian authorities, the ballot served as an important barometer of democratic engagement by the citizens of Belarus. In the months leading up to the election, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka had imprisoned one of the few presidential candidates—former Prime Minister Mikhail Chygir—on what were clearly politically motivated charges, arrested hundreds of election officials and volunteers, and instituted administrative proceedings against others. Nevertheless, the authorities were unable to prevent the election in at least one critically important respect—according to the opposition CEC, the voting itself was valid because more than half—or 53 percent of the electorate—participated. When one considers that these were unsanctioned elections that challenged Lukashenka’s legitimacy, this is a substantial number of people.

No matter what the imperfections, Mr. Speaker, the opposition’s electoral initiative should send a powerful message to Lukashenka. Clearly, an appreciable number of Belarusian citizens are dissatisfied with the profoundly negative political and socio-economic fallout stemming from his dictatorial inclinations and misguided nostalgia for the Soviet era, to function. Lukashenka signed a decree which introduces extensive restrictions on non-governmental activity and mandates re-registration—by July 1—of political parties and trade unions. The decree, which among other onerous stipulations requires that organizations acknowledge the results of Lukashenka’s illegitimate 1996 referendum, is clearly designed to destroy democratic civil society in Belarus and further consolidate Lukashenka’s repressive rule. Moreover, within the last few months, several disturbing incidents have occurred, among them the March arrests of Viktor Gonchar, Chairman of the opposition CEC, and the Chygir imprisoned, as well as the mysterious disappearances of Tamara Vinnikova, former chair of the National Bank of Belarus and, on May 10, Gen. Yuri Zakharenko, former Interior Minister and a leading opponent of Lukashenka. Just a few days ago, Lukashenka’s government announced that no more foreign priests will be allowed to serve, indicating it is extremely difficult for the Roman Catholic Church, which is rebuilding following the travails of the Soviet era, to function.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly urge the Belarusian Government to comply with its freely underwritten commitments under the Helsinki Final Act and subsequent OSCE agreements and to immediately, without preconditions, convene a genuine dialog with the country’s democratic forces and with the long-suffering Belarusian people.

TRIBUTE TO DR. AUGUSTO ORTIZ AND MARTHA ORTIZ

HON. ED PASTOR
OF ARIZONA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Tuesday, May 25, 1999

Mr. PASTOR. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Dr. Augusto Ortiz and his wife, Mrs. Martha Ortiz. For 50 years, this outstanding couple has offered medical and clinical services to the underserved, rural and urban, Spanish-speaking populations of Arizona. Dr. Ortiz, a medical doctor who graduated from the University of Illinois in 1945, provided the medical services while Martha, who rarely accepted compensation for her services, acted as the full-time administrator, personnel director, and business manager of the practice. The willingness of Dr. and Mrs. Ortiz to forego salaries or their acceptance of “pay what you can” arrangements made medical services affordable and available to many poor residents of Arizona. Thousands of Arizonans owe their health and lives to the caring dedication of this selfless medical team.

Although Dr. Ortiz’ family did not have large amounts of money, they encouraged a love of learning and a dedication to community service. With these values instilled in him as a young boy in Puerto Rico, Dr. Ortiz often dreamed of helping underprivileged people when he grew up. In order to pursue his dream of helping Puerto Ricans, in 1952, Dr. Ortiz forewent a lucrative medical career to aid his compatriots. Dr. Ortiz had to leave his much loved family and childhood home to attend medical school in Illinois. Although he was now thousands of miles away, these early dreams and lessons helped guide and inspire him to continue toward his goal.

In the early 1950’s, while stationed at Luke Air Force Base in Phoenix, Arizona, Dr. Ortiz took on a Herculean task. He readily agreed to assist Dr. Carlos Greth with a medical practice that served 80,000 Spanish-speaking people in Maricopa County. At this time, they were the only Spanish-speaking doctors in Maricopa County.

Aside from generously offering his medical talents, Dr. Ortiz also became a champion for those that he treated. His political motivation was his need to “stand up and speak out” because he felt “an obligation to do something to remedy those problems” which were regularly encountered by his patients. Dr. Ortiz was especially active on behalf of his farm worker patients. He was instrumental in obtaining an Arizona state ban on the short handled hoe, as well as improving the Arizona laws regulating pesticides and field sanitation. Dr. Ortiz’ commitment and accomplishments make him an outstanding role model for the citizen activist. He identified the problems that needed to be addressed, sought logical, humane remedies for them, and consistently persuaded political decision makers to agree to the solutions.

Dr. and Mrs. Ortiz not only emphasized preventive health care, they organized mobile clinics and community health boards to ensure that this message would be heard and spread throughout many Arizona communities. In 1972, Dr. Ortiz joined the University of Arizona Rural Health Office as the Medical Director. Currently, he continues as the Medical Director of the Rural Health Office while maintaining his rural mobile clinic practice in three communities. During his tenure, he has worked tirelessly to encourage the poor and minorities to enter and to succeed in healthcare professions, while continually working to develop and deliver better health services for those in need.

Throughout his career, Dr. Ortiz has received many honors and awards, including: The Arizona Latin-American Medical Association Award; the Arizona Family Doctor of the Year Award; Distinguished Leadership Award, American Rural Health Association (national); and the Jefferson Award for Outstanding Service to the Community, Institute for Public Service (national).

Dr. Ortiz and Martha deserve the nation’s gratitude and respect for the magnitude of the service they have given for such an extended period of time. I ask my colleagues in Congress to join me in applauding and honoring this noble doctor, Dr. Augusto Ortiz, and his admirable wife, Martha Ortiz.

AMERICAN LAND SOVEREIGNTY PROTECTION ACT

SPEECH OF
HON. WALLY HERGER
OF CALIFORNIA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Thursday, May 20, 1999

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 883) to preserve
INDIA’S ANTI-AMERICANISM REVEALED AS DEFENSE MINISTER ATTACKS AMERICA

HON. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART
OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Tuesday, May 25, 1999

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Mr. Speaker, I was disturbed to learn that the Defense Minister of India, George Fernandes, led a meeting of some of the world’s most repressive regimes at which they agreed that their main goal was to “stop the United States,” according to the Indian Express. Fernandes himself called the United States “vulgarly arrogant.” This should offend anyone who cares about this country.

Countries represented at this meeting, according to the newspaper, were Communist China—which has been stealing American nuclear secrets and pouring illegal money into our political campaigns, Libya, Russia, Serbia—the country we are currently fighting, Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, and Castro’s Cuba. Now, Mr. Speaker, I know a bit about Cuba. Castro’s dictatorship in Cuba is one of the most brutal in the world. It has killed and tortured thousands of its opponents.

By now, we all know the stories of how the Indian government has killed tens of thousands of Christians, Sikhs, Muslims, Dalit un-touchables, and others. Just in recent months, I am informed that an Australian missionary named Graham Staines and his two young children, since their safety would most likely be threatened by such a rescue.

The on-going war in Yugoslavia has brought the plight of American POW/MIA to the forefront of the nation’s psyche. We all watched in horror several weeks ago as three captured American servicemen were displayed with visible cuts and bruises on Serbian television. We feared for their lives, their safety and their well-being. It was with great relief that we watched as Staff Sergeants Christopher Stone and Andrew Ramirez and Specialist Steven Gonzales were released, relatively unharmed, from a Serbian prison.

The story of the capture of these three servicemen ended with family reunions and a safe return home to America. However, too many POW/MIA were not so fortunate. There is the possibility that soldiers from the Vietnam and Korean Wars are still living as prisoners of war. It is our duty to do all that we can to bring them home.

The Bring Them Home Alive Act would grant asylum in the U.S. to foreign nationals who help return a living American POW/MIA from either the Vietnam War or the Korean War. The bill specifically allows citizens of the U.S. and American service men and women to bring them home.

I am especially concerned that our country is focusing too much on political issues, and ignoring the tremendous humanitarian problems in Cambodia.

One aspect of these problems—hunger and malnutrition so severe that it is stunting the bodies and brains of more than half of Cambodian children—was explained in a superb article recently in Time Magazine’s Asian edition. We all know the tragic of Cambodia; this article describes a future sure to be needlessly sad.

Cambodia is a fertile land at the crossroads of a thriving regional economy. Its people are hard-working and innovative. With a little peace, and a little humanitarian assistance, they can again be the stable, growing rice exporter they were in the 1960s.

I would respectfully request that Time’s article be included in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.