

URGING THE SENATE TO CONTINUE TO BLOCK THE APPOINTMENT OF U.S. AMBASSADOR TO LAOS

### HON. GEORGE RADANOVICH

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, November 3, 2000

Mr. RADANOVICH. Mr. Speaker, I am troubled by the fact that the State Department has made almost no progress with regard to the disappearance of two Hmong Americans who went missing in Laos more than a year ago. Mr. Michael Vang, a constituent of mine from Fresno, CA, and Mr. Houa Ly, a constituent of Representative MARK GREEN from Appleton, WI, are believed to have been seized by the Pathet Lao along the border of Thailand and Laos. Our constituents have not been seen or heard from since.

I believe the U.S. Congress needs to get tougher with the military dictatorship in Laos and the bureaucrats at the State Department who are content to work gently and cooperatively with the same Lao officials who are likely responsible for the abduction of our constituents. The regime in Laos continues to brutalize and murder its own people, particularly the Lao and Hmong people—many of which have relatives in my Congressional district.

Congressmen Vento, GREEN and I helped to send a strong message to the State Department and to the Laos government last year with the passage of H. Res. 169, which was the first legislation to pass the House of Representatives specific to Laos—and it passed 412 to 20. Among other things it urged the Lao Government to return Mr. Ly and Mr. Vang, or their remains, to United States authorities and their families in America at once; it warned the Lao Government of the serious consequences, including sanctions, of acts of aggression against United States citizens; and finally it urged the Department of State and other appropriate United States agencies to share the maximum amount of information regarding the disappearance of Messrs. Ly and Vang. None of these things have come to pass.

So today I want to thank my colleague, Senator BOB SMITH from New Hampshire, for his efforts to place an ongoing hold on the appointment of a U.S. Ambassador to Laos until a fundamental overhaul of U.S. policy is made toward Laos, and until changes are made with regard to the way the State Department is handling the case of Mr. Michael Vang and Houa Ly.

There are others I would like to thank for their efforts to help us resolve this case. Ms. Susie Vang, the wife of Michael Vang, has repeatedly traveled from Fresno, California to provide crucial testimony at several important events highlighting this case in the 106th Congress. Chairman BEN GILMAN, Congressman MARK GREEN, Congressman Bruce Vento, Congressman RON KIND, Congressman WALLY HERGER and Congressman RICHARD POMBO were also among those who participated. Finally, I am grateful to the Lao Veterans of America, the largest group of Hmong and Lao veterans in the United States based in my district, for their active participation in facilitating

Congress' efforts to bring these Hmong Americans home.

Mr. Speaker, I submit a letter into the RECORD that Congressman MARK GREEN and I recently sent to Senator BOB SMITH regarding the need to keep a hold on the appointment of a U.S. Ambassador to Laos until fundamental changes are made in the way the U.S. State Department handles the Government of Laos and our case.

OCTOBER 6, 2000.

Hon. BOB SMITH,  
U.S. Senate,  
Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATOR SMITH: We would like to thank you for your recent efforts in the Senate to delay the appointment of Douglas Hartwick as Ambassador to Laos. We agree with those efforts and encourage you to remain steadfast in your position.

For years we believe this Administration's policies toward Laos have been fundamentally flawed. Your placing a hold on Mr. Hartwick's Senate approval sends a powerful message that we in Congress reject this Administration's policies toward Laos, and are fully willing to support dramatic steps to force a change in those policies.

We support your efforts for a number of reasons. First and foremost is the State Department's handling over the past 17 months of the case of two Americans—our constituents—missing in Laos since April of last year.

As background, we offer the following brief review of the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of Messrs. Houa Ly of Appleton, Wisconsin, and Michael Vang of Fresno, California. According to America eyewitnesses who were traveling with Messrs. Ly and Vang, Lao government authorities are responsible for this disappearance—a belief we share. Given the Lao government's dismal record on human rights and other matters, we feel this allegation is entirely plausible.

These eyewitnesses have offered the following account of the incident:

"On April 19, 1999, a party of four Hmong-American men—Mr. Houa Ly, Mr. Michael Vang, Mr. Neng Lee and Mr. Hue Vang—were traveling in Thailand near the city of Chiang Khong. The group, having been advised that the nearby Thai-Lao border was open to tourists and the public, crossed the Mekong River into Laos.

"Once across the border, the party split into two groups. Mr. Ly and Mr. M. Vang began speaking to several men, some of whom identified themselves as authorities in the Lao government. Mr. Lee and Mr. H. Vang briefly left the area. When they returned, Mr. Ly and Mr. M. Vang were missing.

"After a brief search, Mr. Lee and Mr. H. Vang witnessed Mr. Ly and Mr. M. Vang being forced onto a boat by Lao men. The boat, with Mr. Ly and Mr. M. Vang aboard, sped away on the Mekong River. Mr. Ly and Mr. M. Vang have not been heard from since.

"On May 4, 1999, upon their return to Chiang Mai, Thailand, Mr. Lee and Mr. H. Vang reported this incident to the American Consulate. Two days later, according to Mr. Lee and Mr. H. Vang, an American official from the consulate informed them he had received reports that both men had been imprisoned and that Mr. Ly may have been killed.

"Subsequent independent reports have suggested that the two men are currently imprisoned by Lao government authorities."

This case was initially brought to our attention in May of last year. Since then, we

have been working together with the families of Messrs. Ly and Vang and attempting to work with the State Department to get to the bottom of the matter.

We have repeatedly stressed the importance of this case to the State Department. Since our initial letter on the matter to Secretary Albright on May 19, 1999, we have worked to emphasize the urgent need to have this case resolved quickly for the sake of all involved. We have written letters, made repeated phone calls, sponsored meetings, organized briefings, held hearings and even passed House legislation dealing specifically with the disappearances.

By the State Department's own admission, the communist government of Laos has been largely uncooperative in the "joint investigation" of the matter undertaken by our two governments. The State Department has nevertheless continued to work directly with the Lao government in their investigation, despite evidence indicating Lao government involvement in the disappearance itself. The investigation, not surprisingly, has produced virtually no results.

Adding insult to injury, the treatment of the families of these two men at the hands of the State Department has been deplorable. Despite repeated State Department promises to keep family members regularly informed of progress and developments in the case, the families have reported that their contact with the State Department has been sporadic and inadequate. The families feel, and we agree, that the State Department has handled the Lao government with kid gloves while treating the families with skepticism and suspicion.

Also, in the course of pursuing answers in this case, Rep. Green and the Ly family were forced to file a formal Freedom of Information Act request with the State Department. An unforgivable seven months passed before the U.S. government documents on the disappearance were finally released to the family.

This pace of "progress" cannot be permitted to continue. We are resolute in our commitment to see this case resolved, and to provide the families of Mr. Houa Ly and Michael Vang the answers they deserve. We believe that is unlikely to occur unless there is a sweeping change in policy toward Laos within the State Department.

The case of these two men is but another result of the deferential, appeasement-oriented Laos policy the State Department has consciously decided to pursue. It is but one of number of damning examples that clearly demonstrate the flaws in that policy.

Consider the following as well:

1. Laos continues to exist as an old-style one-party communist state which maintains a monopoly on power and close relations with the world's remaining communist nations.

2. Human rights abuses by the Lao government continue to be appalling and widespread. The government deploys its security forces against many of its own citizens, including incidents last year in which pro-democracy student demonstrators were arrested and imprisoned. In addition, the Lao government denies its citizens' basic human liberties and rights, including freedom of speech, assembly and religion. These abuses have all been repeatedly documented by Amnesty International and other international organizations. Perhaps most alarming of all, at time when human rights in many areas of the world are improving, the human rights situation in Laos appears to be getting worse.

3. With the help of Vietnamese military forces, the Lao government has waged a systematic military campaign against the Hmong ethnic minority in the Laotian highlands. This campaign has caused inestimable civilian casualties and demonstrates that the regime in Vientiane is willing to wage outright war against its own people to maintain its increasingly unsteady grip on power.

As these distressing events have taken place, the State Department and the U.S. Embassy in Vientiane have utterly failed to recognize, document and address them. These actions by the Lao government continue to take place for the same reason: actions by any dictatorship continue occurring; because no one in power has the courage and determination to stop them.

It is our hope that your brave action in the Senate will force a change in U.S. policy toward Laos, will help advance the case of our two missing constituents, and will assist in moving the people of Laos closer to a day when they will live without fear in a free and open society.

Sincerely,

MARK GREEN,  
GEORGE RADANOVICH,  
MEMBERS OF CONGRESS.

TRIBUTE TO BILL BARRETT OF  
NEBRASKA

SPEECH OF

HON. DAVID L. HOBSON

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, October 31, 2000*

Mr. HOBSON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to my colleague from Nebraska, Congressman BILL BARRETT. BILL and I had the distinction of coming to Congress in the same year, and I have always appreciated his enthusiasm toward issues we have worked on together.

BILL is a fellow Member of Congress who knows the value of visiting constituents at home and where they work. Like me, he spends almost every weekend traveling in his home State so he can spend time with his constituents in their hometowns.

In his first term, BILL was tapped by leadership for two key committees—the Agriculture Committee and the Education and the Workforce Committee. He has worked hard at these assignments and his increasing seniority has allowed him to take a leadership role on a host of pivotal issues including: small business, child care, senior citizens, education, health care, rural development, agriculture, and other important issues.

As chairman of the General Farm Commodities Subcommittee, which he has chaired for three terms, and his assignment as vice-chairman of the Risk Management, Research, and Specialty Crops Subcommittee, BILL BARRETT has been on the forefront of agriculture policy. Through the subcommittees and as vice-chairman of the full House Agriculture Committee, he played a vital role in overseeing the 1996 Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act, which unleashed U.S. agriculture from antiquated programs and overbearing Federal intrusion.

BILL has been a leader in balancing the Federal budget and reducing taxes. In the

106th Congress, he has worked to maintain fiscal discipline while paying down the national debt and ensuring the long-term viability of Social Security. His priorities for agriculture have included export market development, further regulatory relief, and improved risk management options.

In another parallel to my own experiences, BILL BARRETT's public service didn't begin in the Nation's capital. He started at the grassroots level and has been active in local, State, and national politics for many years. He was a member of the Nebraska Unicameral Legislature from 1979–90 and served as Speaker the last four of those years.

As Ohio's Seventh District Representative to the Congress of the United States, I take this opportunity to join with members of the Nebraska Congressional delegation and the rest of his colleagues in the U.S. House of Representatives to honor the efforts and the many outstanding achievements of Representative BILL BARRETT. His many contributions as a Member of the House of Representatives will be long remembered in Congress and by the people of Nebraska.

HONORING CONGRESSWOMAN  
TILLIE FOWLER

HON. JUANITA MILLENDER-McDONALD

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, November 3, 2000*

Ms. MILLENDER-McDONALD. Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pride to congratulate my colleague and good friend Congresswoman TILLIE FOWLER on her exemplary service to her district and the nation as she retires from the U.S. Congress.

Congresswoman FOWLER is well known as a determined advocate for a strong national defense and has worked with great success on behalf of the military personnel and facilities in her district and around the country. Congresswoman FOWLER supported me immensely as I secured \$5 million in the Fiscal Year 2000 Defense Appropriations bill for the Women in Military Service for America Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery. These funds were used for much needed maintenance to the memorial. Over the past 3 years Congresswoman FOWLER has joined me in organizing a wreath laying ceremony at the Women's Memorial to pay homage to the thousands of women who have served in our armed services. Congresswoman FOWLER has served graciously and energetically as co-host of this very touching ceremony. The Women's Memorial was dedicated on October 18, 1997 and stands as the nation's only major national memorial honoring women who have served in our Nation's Armed Forces during all eras and in all services.

I have been fortunate to serve with Congresswoman FOWLER on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. Together, we have worked for needed improvements to road, mass transit, water, and public works infrastructure. She is one of the hardest working Members I have had the pleasure of working with on this committee. I applaud Congresswoman FOWLER for her dedication to serving

the interests of her constituents and the nation. She has been an outstanding colleague and a good friend. I feel privileged to have worked with the Congresswoman and wish her God speed as she embarks upon another endeavor.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. ELIJAH E. CUMMINGS

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, November 3, 2000*

Mr. CUMMINGS. Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I was unavoidably detained and missed rollcall No. 592. I would have voted "aye."

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. DANNY K. DAVIS

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, November 3, 2000*

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I was absent from the House when the following votes were taken. Had I been present on the following items my vote would have been the same as indicated following the resolution.

Oct. 30, 583, H. Res. 663, on agreeing to the Resolution Providing for consideration of S. 2485; and Corrections in the enrollment of H.R. 2614, "yes"; Oct. 30, 582, H. Res. 663, on ordering the Previous Question Providing for consideration of S. 2485; and Corrections in the enrollment of H.R. 2614, "yes"; Oct. 30, 581, H. Res. 662, on agreeing to the Resolution Providing for consideration of certain joint resolutions making further continuing appropriations for 2001, "yes"; Oct. 30, 580, H. Res. 662, on Ordering the Previous Question Providing for consideration of certain joint resolutions making further continuing appropriations for FY 2001, "yes"; Oct. 30, 579, motion, on hour of meeting, "yes"; Oct. 30, 578 H.J. Res. 120, on Passage Further Continuing Appropriations for FY 2001, "yes"; Oct. 30, 577, Journal, on Approving the Journal, "yes"; Oct. 29, 576, H.R. 4577, on Motion to Instruct Conferees Making Appropriations for Labor, Health and Human Services for Fiscal Year 2001, "yes"; Oct. 29, 575, H.J. Res. 119, on Passage Further Continuing Appropriations for FY 2001, "yes"; Oct. 29, 574, Journal, on Approving the Journal, "yes"; Oct. 28, 573, H.R. 4577, on Motion to Instruct Conferees Making Appropriations for Labor, Health and Human Services for Fiscal Year 2001, "yes"; Oct. 28, 572, H.R. 4577, on Motion to Instruct Conferees Making Appropriations for Labor, Health and Human Services for Fiscal Year 2001, "yes"; Oct. 28, 571, H.J. Res. 118, on Passage Further Continuing Appropriations for FY 2001, "yes"; Oct. 28, 570, Journal, on Approving the Journal, "yes"; Oct. 19, H.R. 4541, to Authorize and Amend the Commodity Exchange Act to Promote Legal Certainty, Enhance Competition, and reduce Systematic Risk in Markets for Futures and Over the Counter Derivatives, and for other Purposes, "yes."