EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

Wednesday, June 14, 2000

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, today the Congress of the United States is honoring President Lennart Meri of the Republic of Estonia at a special reception here in the Capitol Building paying tribute to the contribution of the United States to the freedom of the Baltic states. Sixty years ago, in 1940 as World War II raged in Europe, the Baltic nations—Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania—lost their freedom, first falling under Soviet control, then Nazi German occupation, and then again under Soviet dominance.

For half a century—from 1940 until 1990 when the Baltic states regained their independence—the United States government refused to recognize the occupation of the Baltic states. This policy of non-recognition was a public affirmation of the right of these three nations to their independence. When the Soviet Union collapsed ten years ago, the American people joined in the celebration as Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia once again emerged as independent and democratic states.

It is appropriate, Mr. Speaker, that we mark today the six decades of American support for the independence of the Baltic States. It is particularly noteworthy that President Lennart Meri is here in the United States to join us in celebrating a decade of renewed independence for Estonia.

Mr. Speaker, President Lennart Meri's life mirrors the tragedy and pathos of the Estonian and Baltic struggle for national independence and democracy. As a young man, President Meri and his family were deported to Siberia along with thousands of other Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians. It is particularly noteworthy that we are holding this celebration today, because today is the anniversary of the date that Lennart Meri and his family were expelled from Estonia and forcibly taken to Siberia—June 14, 1941.

Later, after returning to Estonia, President Meri graduated cum laude from Tartu University. Unable to practice his profession as a historian, he traveled to the most remote areas of the Soviet Union, where he wrote and produced films on the cultures of small ethnic groups. Meri's literary works, films and translations contributed significantly to the preservation of the Estonian national identity.

Lennart Meri's shift of focus from literary to political activities took place in 1988 when he established the non-governmental Estonian Institute to establish cultural contacts with the countries of the West. These Estonian cultural missions, established under his auspices, became embassies of Estonia when the country formally regained its independence in 1991. Lennart Meri was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs on April 12, 1990, following Estonia's first non-communist elections in over fifty years. He established formal diplomatic contacts with countries of Europe, the United States, and other nations, and he represented Estonia at a number of international conferences. He also served briefly as Estonia's ambassador to Finland. On October 6, 1992, Lennart Meri was elected President of the Republic of Estonia, and in September 1996 he was reelected to this position.

Mr. Speaker, I invite my colleagues to join me in extending a special warm welcome to President Lennart Meri of Estonia.

HONORING ERICA VASQUEZ

Wednesday, June 14, 2000

Mrs. WILSON. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to support the efforts of Erica Vasquez to raise funds for the Leukemia Society of America by running a marathon in Walt Disney World. She represented a 7-year-old boy, Adam Valencia, who has acute lymphoblastic leukemia. Erica was the youngest runner on the Team in Training Desert Mountain States Chapter, training for five months and raising money to compete. She even created her own donation forms and sent them out to businesses, doctors, lawyers, friends, and family members. Though they could not run with her, she gave them an important opportunity to do their part.

Sadly, Erica was inspired to help others because of a personal loss: in one year, she lost two cousins and an aunt to cancer. This tragedy inspired her to fight the disease any way she could. Her immediate goal is to increase awareness about Leukemia. Until a cure is found, people like Erica will continue to fight in whatever way they can, including increasing education about cancer and fundraising for treatment.

Mrs. WILSON. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to extend my sincere congratulations to the members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 90 of New Haven, Connecticut as they celebrate their 100th Anniversary.

Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise today to extend my sincere congratulations to the members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 90 of New Haven, Connecticut as they celebrate their 100th Anniversary.

Mr. DELAURO. Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise today to extend my sincere congratulations to the members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 90 of New Haven, Connecticut as they celebrate their 100th Anniversary.

Mr. Speaker, I invite my colleagues to join me in extending a special warm welcome to President Lennart Meri of Estonia.