

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES—Tuesday, May 20, 2008

The House met at 9 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. McNULTY).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
May 20, 2008.

I hereby appoint the Honorable MICHAEL R. McNULTY to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

NANCY PELOSI,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2007, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 25 minutes and each Member, other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip, limited to 5 minutes, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 9:50 a.m.

U.S.-COLOMBIA TRADE PROMOTION AGREEMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. WELLER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. WELLER of Illinois. Mr. Speaker and ladies and gentlemen of the House, I rise to ask what I consider to be pretty fair questions. That is, if you are in Latin America and you ask anyone in Latin America which country is America's most reliable ally, they likely would say the Republic of Colombia. If you ask anyone in Latin America which political leader in Latin America is America's best partner and most reliable partner, they would say President Uribe, the democratically elected President of Colombia. Ladies and gentlemen, if you asked in Latin America who is the most popular political figure in the entire hemisphere in his own nation, you would discover it's President Uribe, the President of Colombia, who has an over 83 percent approval rating.

Why? Because he has made tremendous progress, strengthening what is Latin America's longest-standing democracy, reducing violence, making tremendous progress against the three terrorist groups that operate and that

have operated for the last several decades in Colombia—the two Communist groups of the FARC and the ELM and the right-wing paramilitaries. He has made tremendous progress.

I would like, Mr. Speaker, to put into the RECORD two news stories from the BBC.

I would note the first story I want to put into the RECORD is the announcement that President Uribe was sending 14 of Colombia's most notorious paramilitary drug lords to the United States to face drug charges.

The second article I would like to put into the RECORD just ran this week. It was of a top commander of the FARC, which is the Communist narcotrafficking terrorist organization which has been fighting the democratically elected government of Colombia.

In just this past week, one of their top commanders surrendered. Her name is Nelly Avila Moreno. Her nickname was Karina, and she is one of the most notorious FARC commanders. She not only surrendered but she called on other FARC rebels to follow her example and surrender, basically saying it's over; it's time to call it a day to stop the civil war, to stop the narcotrafficking and to reach a peace agreement with the democratically elected Government of Colombia.

The reason I bring this up is, just a few weeks ago, this House, the Democratic majority, voted to turn its back on President Uribe. It voted to turn its back on the democratically elected Government of Colombia, America's most reliable partner. You think about it. We have no more reliable partner in Latin America when it comes to counterterrorism, to counternarcotics than the democratically elected Government of Colombia.

What is interesting is we have a trade agreement, a trade promotion agreement, that we have reached with Colombia. It is good for the United States. Right now, Colombian products enter the United States duty-free, tax-free, but U.S. products exported to Colombia face tariffs and taxes. Bulldozers made in my district face taxes of up to 12 to 15 percent, making our products less competitive with Asian products trying to get into the Colombian market as well. In the almost 2 years since this trade agreement was reached, the stalling efforts by this democratic leadership against Colombia has cost U.S. manufacturers and farmers \$1 billion in higher tariffs and in higher taxes on U.S. products.

What I point out is this trade agreement wipes out those taxes, making

U.S. manufactured goods, U.S. corn and soybeans more competitive.

Again, Colombian products enter the United States' market duty-free today. They don't face those taxes when they come here, but our products face taxes when they go there. The folks back home whom I represent, they say, you know, we want an even playing field. We're happy to trade with anyone as long as we have an even playing field here. Their products come in duty-free. We want the same opportunity. President Uribe and the democratically elected Government of Colombia have agreed to do that. We just need to ratify the agreement, which is to the advantage of American manufacturers and to American farmers.

Ladies and gentlemen, the reason I mention the prosecution of the paramilitaries, the reason I mention the surrender by a top FARC commander is those who oppose reducing tariffs on U.S.-made products argue that Colombia just doesn't deserve it. They've not done enough when it comes to reducing violence and in going after the narcotraffickers and the terrorists.

Under President Uribe, he has increased the prosecution budget of the State Attorney General, the State prosecutor for the entire country—a nation of 42 million people—by 72 percent in the last 2 years. He has added over 400 new prosecutors.

Ladies and gentlemen, the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement is a good agreement for Illinois manufacturers, for Illinois farmers, for U.S. manufacturers, and for U.S. farmers. Let's ratify this agreement. Let's work with the best partner we have in Latin America.

I urge the Speaker to bring to this floor the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement. Let's give it an up-or-down vote, and I believe it will pass with overwhelmingly bipartisan support.

[From the Economist, May 15, 2008]

FREE TRADE IN THUGS: GETTING TOUGHER WITH RIGHT-WING WARLORDS

In a surprise move on May 13th, President Álvaro Uribe announced the extradition to the United States of 14 of Colombia's most notorious paramilitary warlords on drug-trafficking charges. As well as sending a warning to other right-wing paramilitaries, the aim is to show Democrats in Washington that Mr. Uribe means what he says about breaking with paramilitary groups who continue to murder trade unionists and other left-wingers.

Democratic congressional leaders and their trade-union allies have cited those murders as a reason for their refusal to approve a

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.

free-trade agreement with Colombia. Mr. Uribe may also be hoping to boost his already soaring approval ratings to strengthen his hand in an eventual bid for an unprecedented third term as president. More than two terms in a row are currently banned by the constitution, so this would require approval by Congress.

Mr. Uribe's move could backfire. Human-rights groups fear that it will rob the victims of the compensation that they are entitled to from their tormentors, and could also remove the evidence needed for a successful investigation into why Colombia's paramilitaries and their political accomplices have hitherto enjoyed impunity. More than 60 congressmen, most allies of Mr. Uribe, are either already in prison or under investigation in Colombia for alleged links to paramilitaries. Last month, Mario Uribe, the president's cousin and close political ally, was arrested.

"The good news is that these paramilitary bosses could now face serious jail time," said José Miguel Vivanco, Americas director of Human Rights Watch, a lobbying group. (In the United States, cocaine dealers can get 30 years or more.) "The bad news is they may no longer have any reason to collaborate with Colombian prosecutors investigating their atrocities . . . Just as local prosecutors were beginning to unravel the web of paramilitary ties to prominent politicians, the government has shipped the men with the most information out of the country," he lamented.

In fact, the United States has agreed to allow Colombian prosecutors continued access to the extradited men. They have also apparently agreed to transfer to Colombia any seized assets or fines imposed on the warlords to compensate more than 100,000 victims who have come forward. Created in the 1980s by wealthy ranchers to protect themselves from attacks by the left-wing FARC guerrillas, the paramilitaries developed into armed gangs, accused of many thousands of killings as well as drug-trafficking and money-laundering.

Explaining his decision in a televised address on May 13th, Mr. Uribe said the extradited men had violated the conditions of a 2003 pact with the government under which they agreed to surrender to the authorities in exchange for relatively light prison sentences—a maximum of eight years—and protection against extradition. In return, they had promised to confess to their crimes, cease all illegal activities and use their drug money to compensate the victims of their appalling crimes. But the 14 warlords had continued to run their criminal networks from prison and had failed to pay reparations, Mr. Uribe said.

If the move was made with one eye on Washington, its timing appears to have been determined by a legal wrangle. Groups representing victims have been fighting to halt the extraditions. This appears to have prompted Mr. Uribe's decision to send the paramilitaries to the United States. Colombia's Supreme Court had recently supported these groups, ruling that extraditions of paramilitary bosses should be carried out only after they had confessed to their crimes and paid reparations. But this was overturned by a judicial council last week. Within hours, the first paramilitary leader to be extradited, Carlos Mario Jiménez, alias "Macaco", was on a plane bound for the United States, a journey made a week later by his 14 colleagues. More may follow.

[From BBC News]

FARC CAPTIVE CALLS FOR SURRENDER

A top commander of the FARC rebels in Colombia has urged other rebels to follow her example and surrender.

Nelly Avila Moreno, known as Karina, handed herself in to soldiers over the weekend in the latest blow to FARC.

She said FARC was falling apart under pressure from the military and growing desertions. Several key leaders have been killed in recent months.

Karina has been blamed for a string of murders and abductions in the north-western Antioquia region.

Her surrender is a coup for President Alvaro Uribe, who made her a priority target for the security forces in 2002, the BBC's Jeremy McDermott says.

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, has been fighting to overthrow the government for more than 40 years.

NOT BLOODTHIRSTY

"To my comrades: Change this life that you are leading in the guerrilla group and re-enter society with the government's reinsertion plan," she said at a news conference called by the army in Medellín.

Her unit had been whittled down to fewer than 50 fighters—down from several hundred—when she surrendered.

Karina said she had been out of contact with FARC's seven-member ruling secretariat for two years.

"The decision [to surrender] was made because of the pressure by the army in the area," she said.

She said she was shaken by the killing of secretariat member Ivan Rios by one of his bodyguards in March.

The bodyguard had cut off Rios's hand and turned it in with his laptop computer in return for a reward.

The government has offered bounties for top rebel commanders. Karina's was \$1m (£512,000). Two weeks ago, President Uribe appealed to her to surrender.

She contacted the army who sent a helicopter to pick up her and another guerrilla, known as Michin.

She denied involvement in the 1983 murder of President Uribe's father and said she was not the "bloodthirsty" woman the authorities described her as.

WOMEN VETS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Oklahoma (Ms. FALLIN) for 5 minutes.

Ms. FALLIN. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With Memorial Day right around the corner, now is the time to reflect upon the courage, the dedication and the patriotism personified by the men and the women in our Armed Forces. I know many Americans will stop this weekend and will thank a veteran in their family or in their community for their service to our Nation. They may meet a young soldier back from a tour of duty in Iraq and may quietly just thank God that we are born in a Nation where freedom is valued and fought for.

In our modern military, it is becoming increasingly likely that a returning soldier is a woman, and while men still outnumber women in the Armed

Forces, military service is no longer a career choice for men only. Today, there are more women than ever choosing to serve their country. They are pilots, engineers, commanders of ships, military police, and nurses. Deployed in two different theaters, women are playing a vital role in our war efforts.

Now more than 185,000 women have been deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom and in other missions since 2001. Since its inception, women have played a vital role in defending our Nation and its freedoms. Whether it is in a hospital, in the tents of the revolution, in the shipyards of World War II or in the strategic combat positions they hold in our modern military, the contribution of women to our national defense is undeniable.

Tomorrow, I will be honored to join several of my colleagues from this chamber as we lay a wreath at the Arlington National Cemetery to honor the more than over 350 women in uniform who have died defending this great Nation since World War I.

In a few hours, we will be given the opportunity to honor these women and their significant contributions to our military when we vote on House Resolution 1054: Honoring the service and achievements of women in the Armed Forces and female veterans. By supporting this resolution, we can send a clear message to our women in the military and to our women veterans that your service is not forgotten nor is your courage, your patriotism nor your sacrifice. Today, we honor you all.

OFFSHORE DRILLING

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. POE) for 5 minutes.

Mr. POE. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As gasoline prices soar to almost \$4 a gallon, the American driving public wants Congress to do something about it, and it is our responsibility.

Where I live, I represent a good part of rural southeast Texas, and many of these individuals are rice farmers, and they work the land, and they can't afford the diesel for their pickup trucks and for their trucks to go and work at the refineries in southeast Texas. All people throughout the country have this same common issue: Why are gasoline prices so high? Why isn't Congress doing something about it?

Well, part of the reason is Congress, instead of exploring our own natural resources, Congress has decided to make the decision to punish energy consumption in this country and to make it more difficult for America to take care of Americans. Congress' policy is let's rely on OPEC; let's rely on that dictator Chavez and get their crude oil while we figure out something else to do on how to take care of ourselves down the road, but the problem