

they have 1 million members. Thirty-nine killings in 2007 is a murder rate of 4 unionists per 100,000. There were 15,400 homicides in Colombia last year, not counting combat deaths, according to the national police. That is a murder rate of 34 citizens per 100,000.

Many in Congress, moreover, assume that "assassinations" means murders that are carried out for union activity. But the union research center says that in 79 percent of the cases going back to 1986, it has no suspect or motive. The government doesn't either.

When the Inter American Press Association several years ago investigated its list of murdered Colombian journalists, it found that more than 40 percent were killed for nonjournalistic reasons. The unions have never done a similar investigation.

There are, however, a growing number of convictions for union murders in Colombia. There were exactly zero convictions for them in the 1990s, Colombia's bloodiest decade, when right-wing paramilitaries and leftist guerrillas were at the height of their strength. Each assassinated the suspected supporters of the others across society, including in unions.

With help from the United States, in 2000 the Colombian military and the judicial system began to reassert themselves. Prosecuting cases referred by the unions themselves, the attorney general's office won its first conviction for the murder of a trade unionist in 2001. Last year, the office won nearly 40.

Of the 87 convictions won in union cases since 2001, almost all for murder, the ruling judges found that union activity was the motive in only 17. Even if you add the 16 cases in which motive was not established, the number doesn't reach half of the cases. The judges found that 15 of the murders were related to common crime, 10 to crimes of passion and 13 to membership in a guerrilla organization.

The unions don't dispute the numbers. Instead, they say the prosecutors and the courts are wasting time and being anti-union by seeking to establish motive—a novel position in legal jurisprudence.

The two main guerrilla groups have an avowed strategy of infiltrating unions, which attracts violence. About a third of the identified murderers of union members are leftist guerrillas. Most of the rest are members of paramilitary groups—presumed to be behind two of the four trade unionist murders this month. The demobilization of most paramilitary groups, along with the prosecutions and government protection of union leaders, has contributed to the great drop in union murders.

President Álvaro Uribe, who has thin skin, can be unwisely provocative when responding to complaints from unions and human rights groups. Still, the level of unionization in Colombia is roughly equal to that in the United States and slightly below the level in the rest of Latin America. The government registered more than 120 new unions in 2006, the last year for which numbers are available. The International Labor Organization says union legal rights in Colombia meet its highest standards. Union leaders have been cabinet members, a governor and the mayor of Bogotá.

Delaying the approval of the trade agreement would be convenient for Democrats in Washington. American labor unions and human-rights groups have made common cause to oppose it this election year. The unions oppose the trade agreement for traditional protectionist reasons. Less understandable are the rights groups.

Human Rights Watch says that it has no position on trade but that it is using the withholding of approval to gain political le-

verage over the Colombian government. Conversely, they are harming Colombian workers in the process. The trade agreement would stimulate economic growth and help all Colombians.

Madam Speaker, I rise in support of the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement. I urge the Speaker of the House to bring this important agreement to the floor for a vote, an agreement that was, where negotiations were completed 2 years ago, where an agreement that was signed 18 months ago and has been waiting for a long time. This agreement is a good agreement for America. It's a good agreement for Illinois. It's also a good agreement for Colombia.

Illinois is a major exporting State. My district is dependent on exports to grow jobs. And last year my State of Illinois exported \$214 million worth of Illinois products to Colombia, and that's just the beginning because under the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement, 80 percent of all tariffs, and tariffs are taxes, on U.S. and Illinois products are eliminated immediately when the trade agreement goes into effect.

And I would note today that Colombian products come into the United States duty-free, without taxes. But we suffer taxes when we export to Colombia.

And I would note that the facts have shown that exports grow 50 percent faster with nations like Chile and Peru and Central America, where we have trade agreements, than those where we do not.

Who is Colombia? Well, Colombia is our most reliable partner and best friend in Latin America. Colombia is our most reliable partner in counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism. It's the longest standing democracy in all of Latin America. And they have a popular president, President Uribe. The reason President Uribe has been so popular is he's reduced violence; he's brought security to the entire country.

People today feel secure traveling between cities, where five and 10 years ago they feared to go. In fact, 71 percent of Colombians today say they feel more secure under President Uribe. 37 percent say President Uribe respects human rights. Homicides are down by 40 percent; kidnappings are down by 76 percent. In fact, the murder rate today in Colombia is lower than Baltimore or Washington, D.C.

No wonder President Uribe is the most popular elected official in this entire hemisphere. And compare that 80 percent approval rating President Uribe enjoys with the 18 percent that this Congress suffers and the difference in approval.

Now those who oppose the U.S.-Colombia Trade Agreement say, well, Colombia just hasn't done enough. They need to keep doing more before we'll give them the privilege of having this agreement with the United States. And they say that there's been violence against labor leaders.

Well, let's look at the facts. President Uribe has made major changes in

how they prosecute those who commit murder and violent acts. He's added 418 new prosecutors, 545 new investigators, 2,166 new posts overall in the Prosecutor General's office. And he's increased prosecution funding by 75 percent.

A respected labor leader in Colombia said, Carlos Rodriguez, President of the United Workers Confederation said about these new posts and this funding, never in the history of Colombia have we achieved something so important. \$39 million was spent this past year providing bodyguards and protection for 1,500 labor leaders and activists. No other group enjoys this special kind of protection. And it's been successful. I would note no labor leader has suffered an attack or lost his life who's participated in this program.

The International Labor Organization has removed Colombia from its labor watch list. Colombia has agreed to a permanent ILO representative in Colombia. That helps explain why 14 major labor leaders in Colombia have endorsed this trade agreement.

Colombia is our best friend in Latin America. It's our most reliable ally. Colombia deserves a vote.

Think about it. 2 years this trade agreement has waited; 18 months since it was signed by the leadership of both countries.

Latin America is undergoing some challenges, and those who are not friends of the United States have made it very clear they want to defeat the U.S.-Colombia Trade Agreement because they think that's in their best interest, and they've also said that if the Congress defeats the trade agreement, it will send a powerful signal to all Latin America that the United States can't be trusted, and that if you're a friend of the United States, in the long run they'll let you down.

Well, President Uribe and the government of Colombia, the democratically elected government of Colombia, are our best friends, our most reliable allies in all Latin America, and all Latin America is watching on how we treat our best friend.

This agreement is good for America. It's good for Illinois. If you're an Illinois worker, an Illinois manufacturer, an Illinois farmer, you win under the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Authority.

Madam Speaker, I urge that this House schedule soon a vote on the U.S.-Colombia Trade Agreement and ratify this agreement so important to democracy, freedom and economic growth in our own hemisphere.

□ 1730

THE CURRENT HOUSING CRISIS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. CLARKE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. CLARKE. Madam Speaker, today I rise to express my dismay regarding

the housing crisis. It's a multifaceted housing crisis. It's a mortgage crisis for home buyers. It's an inventory crisis for the affordable rentals. It is an investment crisis for public housing.

Two top executives at Countrywide Financial are expected to receive a combined golden parachute totaling \$19 million, and while these top executives cash out their stock options, hard-working Americans are left struggling, trying to prevent the loss of their homes and ultimately their financial ruin.

It is truly incredible how the Bush administration, SEC Chairman Cox, Treasury Secretary Paulson, and Federal Reserve Chairman Bernanke have seen fit to extend billions of dollars for a Wall Street bailout but won't provide additional, adequate aid to borrowers fighting every day to save their properties.

Today, we are looking at one of the biggest financial catastrophes since the Great Depression.

Brooklyn, New York, has five of the top 10 neighborhoods with the highest subprime lending rates, including East Flatbush, which is located in my district.

Madam Speaker, after analysis and examination, the sharp increases in foreclosures are connected to predatory lending practices from abusive lending institutions. New York City will likely see more than 10,000 foreclosures this year, which is roughly double the number of foreclosures in 2004.

But while Washington is concerned about the impact of the subprime mortgage crisis on Wall Street, on Main Street many hardworking people are getting left behind. Hardworking families and individuals like those I represent in central Brooklyn have for far too long been targets of predatory lending practices; yet this administration comes to the rescue of the high-profile executives and leaves the very people who they are sworn to serve, defend, and protect to fend for themselves.

We must not forget that there is another dimension to the housing crisis occurring in communities less traveled by many, in the community where many are suffering from the affordable rental housing crisis. These families are being squeezed out of their homes as landlords convert their apartments to high-priced condominiums, earning double-digit rent increases or opting out of Federal subsidy programs such as Mitchell-Lama or project-based section 8 as more affordable rental apartments are being lost while the demand increases.

Let's not forget as well public housing's vital role in this housing crisis. Public housing is home to more than 400,000 New Yorkers. The New York City Housing Authority, which has a running deficit of more than \$200 million every year, has been severely reducing their spending on security, maintenance, sanitation, and repairs, leaving many residents living in uninhabitable conditions.

NYCHA had to lay off employees and close youth centers in an attempt to preserve its core services, and in housing projects located in neighborhoods such as Brownsville, Brooklyn, crime continues to reach into the lives of our families.

Public housing is essential to New York City, and this negligence simply cannot continue.

So, in conclusion, Madam Speaker, the Bush administration's actions, or lack thereof, clearly demonstrates that instead of preventing the devastating loss to our communities by providing financial assistance to homeowners, providing full funding to reduce the affordable housing stock from dwindling, and preventing public housing units from deteriorating, our President has taken the path of least resistance by bailing out corporate fat cats and turning a blind eye and a deaf ear to the hard-working families of my district and of our Nation.

Madam Speaker, I look forward to working with my colleagues to turn this devastating condition around and restoring the pride and dignity of responsible, thriving communities.

THE MURDER OF TWO TEENAGE GIRLS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. POE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. POE. Madam Speaker, the year was 1993, 15 years ago, when two teenage girls, Jennifer Ertman and Elizabeth Pena, 14 years of age and 16 years of age, were walking home one evening. Unfortunately for them, when they took a shortcut, they came across a gang by the name of the Black and Whites. Their gang leader was Jose Ernesto Medellin.

He and his fellow gangsters kidnapped these two teenage girls, brutally assaulted them, taunted them, raped them for over an hour, and then with the shoelaces from the tennis shoes of these two girls, they made a noose and strangled both of these girls.

The brutal killing that took place, Madam Speaker, as you are aware being from Houston, incensed the people of the Houston area, especially the way in which these two girls met their death. But 5 days later, Jose Medellin was arrested, and in his possession, he had on his wrist a Mickey Mouse watch that he had stolen from Jennifer Ertman, his token of the murder of a little girl. He was proud of what he had done. He was so proud of it he even bragged about it and confessed to the Houston Police Department of raping and killing these two girls after he was properly warned.

He was tried for capital murder. The State was seeking the death penalty, and 12 jurors in a court in Houston, Texas, convicted him and gave him the death penalty, which he earned and deserved for what he did to these two teenage girls. He appealed his case all

the way to Supreme Court, and the Supreme Court of the United States upheld his conviction saying it was lawful. But that was not the end of the story.

Because, you see, 15 years later Jose Ernesto Medellin is still alive. And back when this trial occurred 15 years ago, I met the families of these two teenage girls, and they to this day continue to suffer and wonder if justice will ever be served. And the reason that he has not met his just reward is because he appealed his case again to the Supreme Court, and the Supreme Court right down the street last week upheld the conviction for a second time.

His second appeal was somewhat unique because, you see, it turns out Jose Ernesto Medellin, who was fluent in English, apparently is illegally from the nation of Mexico, and he was an illegal immigrant when he committed this homicide. Back in the days of 1993, the Houston Police Department didn't even ask people what nationality they were when they arrested them, but be that as it may, the Mexican Government then decided to sue the United States of America in the World Court, claiming that the State of Texas should have told Jose Ernesto Medellin that he had the right to consult with the Mexican consulate before he confessed. Of course, the Houston Police Department never told him he couldn't consult with the Mexican consulate. He was warned properly under Federal law and under State law.

But the Mexican Government was not satisfied with that after the conviction was upheld, and 10 years later, they filed this lawsuit in the World Court. And the World Court ruled that the State of Texas had to retry Jose Ernesto Medellin for capital murder because he was not told he should have been allowed to talk to his Mexican consulate.

Of course, this gets more complicated because, you see, the President of the United States intervened on behalf of the nation of Mexico. After this decision was made in the World Court, the President of the United States told the courts in Texas to follow the World Court order, retry Jose Ernesto Medellin for capital murder, and the Texas courts, in all due respect to the administration, ignored the President's request because, as they said, the judicial branch is independent of the executive branch, and the President has no jurisdiction over telling any court, much less Texas courts, what to do.

It turns out that Jose Ernesto Medellin is not the only Mexican national on death row in the United States. There are 54 others who have been tried throughout the country, most of them in Texas, and have been given the death penalty for heinous crimes committed against people in the United States.

So, after that second case came before the Supreme Court, the issue was, after being sued in the World Court by