

Kaptur	Napolitano	Scott (VA)
Keating	Neal	Scott, David
Kildee	Olver	Sensenbrenner
Kind	Pallone	Serrano
Kucinich	Pascarell	Sherman
Langevin	Pastor (AZ)	Shuler
Larsen (WA)	Paul	Sires
Larson (CT)	Perlmutter	Slaughter
Lee (CA)	Peters	Smith (WA)
Levin	Peterson	Speier
Lewis (GA)	Pingree (ME)	Stark
Lipinski	Price (NC)	Sutton
Loebsack	Quigley	Thompson (CA)
Lowey	Rahall	Thompson (MS)
Lujan	Rangel	Thompson (PA)
Lynch	Rehberg	Tierney
Maloney	Reyes	Tonko
Markey	Richardson	Towns
Matsui	Richmond	Tsongas
McCarthy (NY)	Ross (AR)	Van Hollen
McCormack	Rothman (NJ)	Velázquez
McDermott	Roybal-Allard	Visclosky
McGovern	Ruppersberger	Walz (MN)
McKinley	Rush	Wasserman
McNerney	Ryan (OH)	Schultz
Meeks	Sánchez, Linda	Waters
Michaud	T.	Watt
Miller (NC)	Sanchez, Loretta	Waxman
Miller, George	Sarbanes	Welch
Moore	Schakowsky	Wilson (FL)
Moran	Schiff	Woolsey
Murphy (CT)	Schrader	Wu
Nadler	Schwartz	Yarmuth

NOT VOTING—12

Bachmann	Ellison	Payne
Blumenauer	Giffords	Pelosi
Capuano	Hinchev	Runyan
Castor (FL)	Hoyer	Young (AK)

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LANKFORD) (during the vote). There is 1 minute remaining in this vote.

□ 1523

Mr. GENE GREEN of Texas changed his vote from “aye” to “no.”

So the bill was passed.

The result of the vote was announced as above recorded.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

REPORT ON H.R. 2596, COMMERCE, JUSTICE, SCIENCE, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS BILL, 2012

Mr. WOLF, from the Committee on Appropriations, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 112-169) on the bill (H.R. 2596) making appropriations for the Departments of Commerce and Justice, and Science, and Related Agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2012, and for other purposes, which was referred to the Union Calendar and ordered to be printed.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 1, rule XXI, all points of order are reserved on the bill.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair will postpone further proceedings today on the motion to suspend the rules on which a recorded vote or the yeas and nays are ordered, or on which the vote incurs objection under clause 6 of rule XX.

Any record vote on the postponed question will be taken later.

APPROVING RENEWAL OF IMPORT RESTRICTIONS AGAINST BURMA

Mr. BOUSTANY. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the joint resolution (H.J. Res. 66) approving the renewal of import restrictions contained in the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act of 2003, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the joint resolution.

The text of the joint resolution is as follows:

H.J. RES. 66

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. RENEWAL OF IMPORT RESTRICTIONS UNDER BURMESE FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY ACT OF 2003.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Congress approves the renewal of the import restrictions contained in section 3(a)(1) and section 3A (b)(1) and (c)(1) of the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act of 2003.

(b) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—This joint resolution shall be deemed to be a “renewal resolution” for purposes of section 9 of the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act of 2003.

SEC. 2. PAYGO COMPLIANCE.

The budgetary effects of this Act, for the purpose of complying with the Statutory Pay-As-You-Go Act of 2010, shall be determined by reference to the latest statement titled “Budgetary Effects of PAYGO Legislation” for this Act, submitted for printing in the Congressional Record by the Chairman of the House Budget Committee, provided that such statement has been submitted prior to the vote on passage.

SEC. 3. EFFECTIVE DATE.

This joint resolution shall take effect on the date of the enactment of this joint resolution or July 26, 2011, whichever occurs earlier.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. BOUSTANY) and the gentleman from Washington (Mr. MCDERMOTT) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Louisiana.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BOUSTANY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the resolution under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Louisiana?

There was no objection.

Mr. BOUSTANY. I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, as an original cosponsor of this joint resolution, I rise in strong support of H.J. Res. 66, which would continue the imposition of sanctions against the repressive regime in Burma for another year.

The purpose of imposing sanctions against Burma is to promote democracy and respect for human rights and improve living conditions for the Burmese people. Unfortunately, the ruling junta is still dedicated to working against, not toward, those objectives. For that reason I am in favor of continuing our practice of extending im-

port sanctions against Burma for another year.

Burma’s regime is one of the world’s most repressive and continues to oppress democratic movements and humanitarianism. On November 7, 2010, the military junta, known, ironically, as the State Peace and Development Council, or SPDC, held an election for the first time in 20 years. However, while elections are usually considered a step towards democracy, in this case it was actually a step backwards. These elections were not transparent, inclusive, or credible.

Notably, Burma’s leading pro-democracy party, the National League for Democracy, as well as others, was not allowed to participate in the elections. And by ensuring that most candidates were former high-ranking government and military officials, the election “victory” by the government-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party simply means that the military junta remained in control with the veneer of an election to simply justify itself.

Shortly following the elections, Aung San Suu Kyi—freedom fighter, Nobel Peace Prize recipient and Congressional Gold Medal winner, and general secretary of the NLD—was finally released after having been falsely detained for 15 of the past 21 years.

However, in a move highlighting how little things have changed in Burma, the junta recently warned Suu Kyi that “there may be chaos and riots” if she continues on her cross-country tour to meet with supporters. The government also chided Suu Kyi and the NLD for their political work and threatened that “they should stop doing so to avert unnecessary consequences.” On Suu Kyi’s last tour in 2003, she was attacked by a pro-government mob that killed many of her followers and landed her under house arrest for the next 7 years.

In short, the recent election does not represent any kind of shift in domestic Burmese politics. In fact, the political situation in Burma and for the Burmese people has not changed at all.

The human rights situation is no better. The State Department human rights report on Burma, echoed by the March United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution, cites a laundry list of grave human rights violations that are simply appalling. According to the State Department, this repugnant regime, in which military officers wield the ultimate authority at every level of government, continues to use forced labor, denies participation in any democratic processes, and commits extrajudicial killings. The regime detains civic activists indefinitely and without charge, and it engages in harassment, abuse, and detention of human rights and pro-democracy activists. The regime is rumored to hold an estimated 2,100 political prisoners.

Ethnic violence inflicted by the army is also rife. There have been recent reports of renewed fighting in the northern Burmese province of Kachin between the government and ethnic minority villagers, resulting in reportedly up to 20,000 refugees. Not only have these people been driven from their homes and many killed, there have also been widespread reports of the rape of women and children.

What have we been doing on our end? I'm pleased that this Congress amplified our sanctions 3 years ago to eliminate trade in jewelry containing Burmese rubies and jadeite, even if the jewelry was made in, and exported from, a third country. The expansion was designed to bring about multilateral pressure on the regime through the United Nations and the World Trade Organization, similar to successful legislation on conflict diamonds. I urge similar campaigns against Burmese rubies and jadeite at the U.N. and WTO.

I must be clear that I generally view import sanctions with great skepticism. However, if there is a right way to impose sanctions, I think that these Burma sanctions are crafted to maximize the ability to effect change. For example, they require the administration to issue annual reports on Burma that include findings on whether U.S. national security, economic, and foreign policy interests are being served so that we can make an informed decision.

□ 1530

Perhaps the most critical aspect of the Burma sanctions program is that they require us to redirect our attention every summer to the question of whether these sanctions should be continued. Because they are not self-executing, we here in Congress must consider this issue and vote to continue them on an annual basis.

I continue to believe that our greatest hope for effecting real change in Burma is multilateralism. I am therefore disappointed that there has not been sufficient multilateral pressure against this regime.

I strongly urge the administration to put more pressure on our trading partners to place the leaders of this regime under targeted economic pressure that denies them access to personal wealth and sources of revenue.

I call on the United Nations, Burma's Southeast Asian neighbors in ASEAN, and the People's Republic of China to step up engagement considerably.

I support this resolution because it increases our chances to bring about this multilateral effort, to promote democracy and to end the longtime suffering of the Burmese people.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. McDERMOTT. I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of House Joint Resolution 66, a measure to renew the ban on imports for Burma.

Over the past 23 years, Burma's authoritarian regime has detained or killed political opponents, waged war against ethnic minorities and, in the process, accumulated one of the worst human rights records in modern history. Finally, in 2010, with continued pressure from Congress and the inspiring leadership of Nobel Peace Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, Burma's military junta promised to lay down its arms and clear the way for democracy. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, it was a sham.

Parliamentary elections held last November were rife with fraud. Opposition parties were intimidated by the police and banned from offering up candidates. Votes were rigged to provide electoral legitimacy to the existing military rule. Once again, the people of Burma were denied a free and fair opportunity to choose their own leaders. Human rights abuse is widespread and continues to go unprosecuted. Under the guise of a new civilian parliament, it is "business as usual" for the old regime.

In light of the unchanged political reality in Burma, the renewal of America's ban on Burmese imports could not be more urgent. We must send a message to Burma's new rulers, who turned out to be the same old rulers, that empty promises of democratic reform are unacceptable.

Now, there are some who question whether we should maintain our import ban following Burma's election and the formal dissolution of the military junta. Even our European allies have begun to rethink their strategy as EU travel and financial restrictions have been lifted on certain officials in the new government.

The problem with that approach, Mr. Speaker, is that meaningful reform has yet to take place in Burma. By opening our borders to Burmese imports, we would only strengthen and enrich the same old regime that maintains a stranglehold on civic and family life in Burma. According to the U.N., the new government has failed to make any significant progress on land confiscation, forced labor, the internal displacement of people, extrajudicial killings, and sexual violence against women. The Obama administration affirms this view.

Burma's sanctions are unique because they have the widespread support of the Burmese people. Aung San Suu Kyi, herself, recently said, "Sanctions must remain in place" and "should only be lifted when something has changed here." Aung San Suu Kyi's political party, the National League of Democracy, also confirmed its view that American sanctions "do not hurt the public at large" as the true target is Burma's undemocratic leadership.

In response, true to form, the so-called "new government" warned publicly that Suu Kyi and members of her party could meet "tragic ends" if they continued to call for international sanctions.

In passing H.J. Res. 66 and reauthorizing the Block Burmese JADE Act of 2008, Congress will send a clear message of support to the people of Burma in their aspirations for true democracy and lasting peace.

Until there is meaningful reform in Burma, Mr. Speaker, we must keep steadfast in our support of the Burmese people and maintain the pressure on Burma's undemocratic rulers. I urge my colleagues to pass House Joint Resolution 66.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BOUSTANY. Mr. Speaker, I am now pleased to yield 2½ minutes to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. PITTS).

Mr. PITTS. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this important resolution to renew sanctions against the brutal military dictators in Burma.

The plight facing the people of Burma remains terrible. The ruling party in Burma continues to use the rule of law and government apparatus to deprive minority groups of their human rights and their lives, and it does so with impunity. The regime's human rights violations continue to be horrific. The regime in Burma is responsible for committing virtually every human rights violation imaginable. The atrocities perpetrated by the regime range from the use of rape as a weapon of terror, the recruitment of child soldiers, ethnic cleansing, forced labor, political detention, and the list goes on.

I have received firsthand reports in my office which detail the dictatorship's use of ethnic minorities as human landmine sweepers. Over 1 million refugees and 500,000 internally displaced peoples have been forced to flee their homes, and 750,000 of the country's inhabitants remain stateless. Indicative of the times, the regime has now turned to the censorship of the Internet, as well as that of individual e-mail accounts and social networking sites, to block the dissemination of evidence related to the atrocities.

The Burmese Government must realize that such attempts to hide its record of abuse, as well as its dishonest elections and mock constitutional reforms, cannot cover up the junta's war against its own people. Such a record only demonstrates the regime's illegitimacy.

I call on the administration to renew its efforts in fulfilling the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act of 2003, particularly the provision which requires our government to craft a multilateral sanctions regime against Burma.

By renewing these sanctions, Congress is making our Nation's concern for human rights paramount in our foreign relations interests. The administration should do the same. The people of Burma must know that we stand with them.

Mr. McDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from New York (Mr. CROWLEY).

Mr. CROWLEY. I thank my friend from Washington for yielding me such time.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of House Joint Resolution 66.

This measure is a sign of how we can all work together on foreign policy when we put our minds to it. I want to acknowledge the bipartisan support, both here in the House as well as in the Senate, for human rights in Burma.

The Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act and the Burmese JADE Act together have prevented hundreds of millions of dollars from getting into the hands of the Burmese military apparatus. By passing these bills into law and renewing them this year, we have ensured that the 65 million people of Burma see us, the United States, as an ally in their struggle for human rights, and we have helped send a signal to others around the world that the United States will not turn a blind eye to crimes against humanity.

There is no question that Burma is ruled by one of the world's most brutal governments. Over the past year, we have seen ongoing abuses committed by the Burmese military, including rapes, torture and killings. Just last week, Human Rights Watch released a report, documenting how villagers are subjected to summary executions, torture and being used as human shields during conflict. The women in Burma live in constant fear of rapes by soldiers of their own military. For the leaders of the Burmese military, rape is a tactic of war—one used to torment and to intimidate entire populations, not just their immediate victims.

In fact, just 2 weeks ago, on July 5, the Burmese soldiers carried out four more rapes against ethnic civilians. The innocent victims were of all different ages. One of those victims was as young as 12 years of age. That's right. A 12-year-old girl was raped by a member of the Burmese military.

□ 1540

As a result of thousands of brutal rapes and other abuses, Burmese villagers continue to flee their homes into the jungle where they live as refugees or internally displaced people.

As bad as these abuses are, this bill is not only about stopping human rights abuses. We must remember that the inspiration for this measure came from the remarkable woman, Nobel Peace Prize recipient Aung San Suu Kyi. She led her political party to victory in Burma's last free and fair election in 1990. Many people call her the Nelson Mandela of Burma, and the U.S. House of Representatives voted to award her the Congressional Gold Medal.

Up until last November, she was also the world's only imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize recipient, and today, even though she is no longer under formal house arrest, the military has threatened her over and over again in an attempt to intimidate her into silence. She has called on the people throughout the world to take action saying,

"Please use your liberty to promote ours."

She and the democracy movement in Burma have also called for us to maintain sanctions on Burma. This is similar to how the African National Congress led by Nelson Mandela called for sanctions on South Africa in the 1980s.

Passing this bill isn't all we must do. I want to urge the administration to fully implement the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act and Block Burmese JADE Act. The JADE Act gives the administration tools to implement tough bilateral financial sanctions on members of the Burmese regime and its cronies, and we should proceed as soon as possible.

It's important to remember that the United States isn't the only country that has imposed sanctions on Burma. This is not a bilateral effort. It is a multilateral effort. While every country has different types of sanctions, those that have taken action include Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the European Union, and more. We should be doing all we can to expand these sanctions into an even greater multilateral effort. That's why in the Burmese JADE Act, we ask the President to appoint an envoy to work internationally on increasing pressure on the Burmese regime.

Now that this envoy has been nominated, I urge our colleagues in the Senate to confirm him without haste, and I hope he gets to work right away on strengthening and implementing multilateral pressure.

I also believe the administration should work proactively to establish an international investigation into crimes against humanity committed by the Burmese military. The Burmese leadership is clearly carrying out crimes against humanity. The sooner these abuses are investigated, the sooner they will end.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is the right thing to do. I stand in strong support of this bill, and I urge its immediate adoption.

Mr. BOUSTANY. I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. McDERMOTT. I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. HOLT).

Mr. HOLT. Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from Washington, and I rise in support of this resolution.

When I first visited Burma decades ago, I learned what a difference a misguided regime can make. Burma had been a vibrant country known as the Rice Bowl of Asia. Burma had a rich history, fertile land, abundant resources, and a productive population.

In the years following the coup in the early 1960s, the authoritarian regime impoverished the nation and brutalized its people, a pattern that persists today. For more than 20 years, the United States Government has sought to use its influence to try to create conditions for a restoration of democracy and the rule of law in Burma. One tool has been the use of sanctions.

The Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act was signed into law 8 years ago this month, and it requires the President to impose a ban on the import of products from Burma. It blocks U.S. support for loans from international financial institutions and freezes the assets of and bans visas for key members of the military junta that has imposed its will on the Burmese people for decades. I believe these sanctions should be renewed because there is evidence they are working.

Last November, Burmese elections were clearly illegitimate and not a free expression of the will of the Burmese people. But the continuing international pressure on and scrutiny of the junta may be having some tangible effects.

As the international crisis group noted earlier this year, two senior junta leaders have resigned since the elections, and there is some evidence that pressure has eased on some of the minority ethnic groups in the country.

Burma's greatest human rights figure, Aung San Suu Kyi, told the Australian Broadcasting Network yesterday that continued use of targeted sanctions is important. "I think it's much better to have very, very clear targets," she said, and continued, "I do not think it's really very reasonable just to say, 'We want an improvement in human rights, in your human rights record.' It's too vague. The release of political prisoners, the inclusion of all in the political process, the rule of law and so on—pick out the important points and say, 'Well, if you want sanctions removed, you've got to do these.'"

Mr. Speaker, we need to continue standing with Aung San Suu Kyi and all of the freedom-seeking Burmese. This resolution gives us a chance to do that, which is why I urge my colleagues to join us in supporting this resolution.

Mr. BOUSTANY. Mr. Speaker, I continue to reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. McDERMOTT. I would only say that this bill expires on the 26th of July, so we need to act on it quickly.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BOUSTANY. I am in full agreement. We need to move and pass this, and I think we'll get it passed.

I must say to the gentleman from Washington, at least we have a trade bill on the floor. I hope there are many more to come. We're waiting for the President to send the three pending agreements to us so that we can move forward on these and embark on a very aggressive trade agenda.

Mr. KING of New York. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.J. Res. 66, a resolution approving the renewal of import restrictions contained in the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act (P.L. 108-61). I am proud to have once again introduced this legislation this year with the gentleman from New York, Mr. CROWLEY.

In 2003, Congress passed the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act, legislation that

I co-authored with my friend, the late Tom Lantos. President Bush signed this bill into law and Congress has reauthorized these import restrictions every year since. The legislation bans imports from Burma and the issuance of visas to those officials affiliated with the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), the military junta that rules Burma and brutally represses its people. This law also bans U.S. financial transactions that involve individuals or entities connected with the SPDC.

The sanctions are critically important to keeping the pressure on the Burmese junta. The government continues to have one of the worst human rights record in the world and routinely violates the rights of Burmese citizens, including the systematic use of rape as a weapon of war, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and detention, torture and child labor. Moreover, the Burmese regime has more child soldiers than any other country and has destroyed more than 3,700 ethnic villages, displaced approximately 2,000,000 people, more than 600,000 of which are internally displaced, and has taken nearly 2,000 political prisoners.

We must continue to stand with the Burmese people and expose the despicable and reprehensible actions of the SPDC. Sanctions are critical to putting pressure on the junta. In 2008, the Tom Lantos Block Burmese JADE Act (P.L. 110-286) was signed into law, which bans the importation of Burmese gems into the United States and freezes the assets of Burmese political and military leaders. While these steps are significant, others must follow ours and the EU's lead. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) must impose multilateral sanctions against Burma's military regime including a complete arms embargo.

While I applaud the confirmation of Derek Mitchell as Special Coordinator for Burma, there are additional provisions of the Tom Lantos Block Burmese JADE Act that have yet to be implemented. I urge the Obama Administration to call for a UN Commission of Inquiry on Burma to investigate war crimes and crimes against humanity. This Commission is necessary to prevent further killings and to encourage a meaningful political dialogue.

I urge adoption of the resolution.

Mr. BOUSTANY. I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. BOUSTANY) that the House suspend the rules and pass the joint resolution, H.J. Res. 66, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the joint resolution, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

A LITTLE LOCAL FLAVOR

(Mr. PALAZZO asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. PALAZZO. Mr. Speaker, two things come from a town called Kiln, Mississippi: a famous NFL quarterback and Lazy Magnolia Beer. We know Brett's story, but let me tell you about Lazy Magnolia.

One Christmas, Leslie Henderson bought her husband, Mark, a home brew kit. The two engineers started brewing beer and eventually turned their hobby into a business.

We can fix our faltering economy by giving small business owners more responsibility. H.R. 1236, the Small Brew Act, does that, allowing a much needed tax cut to our small brewers. By lowering the tax on the beer they produce, these companies will have more revenue to invest in maintaining and hiring employees. This legislation therefore promises to create over 4,000 jobs.

On that Christmas a few years ago, Lazy Magnolia Beer had no employees. Today it provides jobs to about 20 people in Hancock County. That, my friends, is an American success story.

CONGRATULATING NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS COUNCIL FOR HUMANITIES ON ITS 20TH ANNIVERSARY

(Mr. SABLAN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SABLAN. Mr. Speaker, 20 years ago, one of the most significant and enduring community groups in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands was formed, the Northern Mariana Islands Council for the Humanities. Since its founding, the council has become a well-respected, community-based organization committed to fostering awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the humanities in the Northern Mariana Islands through its support of educational programs that relate the humanities to the indigenous cultures and the intellectual needs and interests of the people of the Commonwealth. The Northern Mariana Islands Council for the Humanities has enhanced the lives of our residents as individuals and enhanced our community as a whole.

The council's board of directors is and has always been extraordinarily passionate and successful in setting and achieving goals that benefit our diverse and remote community. The council's achievements belie our modest population and resources.

Please join me congratulating the Northern Mariana Islands Council for the Humanities on its 20th anniversary of serving the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands community.

Twenty years ago this past April, one of the most significant and enduring community groups in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands was formed: the Northern Mariana Islands Council for the Humanities.

My island community is a melting pot of cultures, an amalgam of languages, the possessor of a 3,500-year-long and colorful history, and the newest participant in this great experiment called democracy in America. The National Endowment for the Humanities founding principle is that knowledge of the humanities—the ideas, people, and events that make up the record of human thought and experience—is both personally rewarding to Ameri-

cans as individuals and critical to our common civic life as a nation. I suspect that nowhere is this sentiment as relevant as it is in the Northern Mariana Islands.

In the two decades since its founding, the NMI Council for the Humanities has become a well-respected community-based organization committed to fostering awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the humanities in the Northern Mariana Islands through its support of educational programs that relate the humanities to the indigenous cultures and the intellectual needs and interests of the people of the Commonwealth. The Council also sponsors programs that explore, document, and recognize the many contributions to our community made by the non-indigenous residents of the Northern Marianas. In furtherance of these programs, collaborative relationships have been established with a variety of local, regional, national, and international organizations and individuals.

The Council accomplishes its mission through financial support from the National Endowment for the Humanities, with which it is affiliated, as well as from the local government, businesses, and individuals throughout our islands. The Council has also been designated an "educational institution" in the Commonwealth, enabling financial donors to take advantage of a local educational tax credit program.

The Council's 13-member board of directors is, and always has been, extraordinarily passionate and successful in setting and achieving goals that benefit our diverse and remote community. Its achievements over the past 20 years belie our modest population and resources. In fact, one former board member is a recipient of the National Humanities Medal—which is awarded to no more than 12 recipients each year whose work has deepened the Nation's understanding of the humanities, broadened our citizens' engagement with the humanities, or helped preserve and expand Americans' access to important resources in the humanities.

Some current programs undertaken by the Council include: the nationally-acclaimed Motherhead/Fatheread program that encourages literacy skills among parents and children; a teachers institute that provides primary-school instructors with a thorough overview of local history; a weekly radio show that provides wide-ranging humanities-based programming; a Micronesian authors initiative that publishes the work of local authors; a community lecture series on humanities topics of interest; a multiyear project to revise the Chamorro-English dictionary; an initiative to promote geotourism in the CNMI; a digital database of primary source documents and images to facilitate the study of local history; and diversified classroom programs that introduce students to the humanities at an early age, including a poetry competition, a junior high school mock trial competition, an annual Covenant Day debate, and curricula that explore multiculturalism in the Commonwealth.

Support of grassroots humanities projects in our community is also a primary focus of the Council. During the past 20 years, over 150 individual grants totaling approximately \$900,000 have been awarded to community groups through the Council's community grants program.

At a time in our nation's history when we encounter oftentimes fierce polemics and uncivil discourse, humanities councils serve an