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House of Representatives

The House met at 10:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Ms. SOLIS).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,

March 11, 2008.

I hereby appoint the Honorable HILDA L. SOLIS 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 30 minutes and each Member, other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip, limited to 5 minutes.

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

COLOMBIA FACT OF THE DAY: COLOMBIA IS STOPPING LABOR VIOLENCE

Mr. WELLER of Illinois. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Ladies and gentlemen of the House, today I rise to urge the Speaker of the House to bring forward the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement. I also ask my colleagues to support this agreement. It's an agreement that's good for America, it's good for my State of Illinois, and it's good for Colombia. In fact, the State that I represent,

Illinois, is a big winner under the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement.

The International Trade Commission did an economic analysis. They said if you're an Illinois worker, an Illinois manufacturer, an Illinois farmer, you're a winner under this trade agreement. Corn, soybeans, pork, beef, manufactured metal products, chemicals, machinery, exports will go up. Why? Because right now Colombian products enter the United States duty-free, tariff-free, tax-free, but our products face tariffs. Caterpillar, the biggest employer in my district, 8,000 workers, their heavy construction equipment faces a 12 percent tariff. For a million-dollar piece of equipment, that's a \$100,000 tax which would be eliminated immediately, day one, when this trade agreement would go into effect.

The bottom line is Illinois will be a big winner.

Now who is Colombia? To begin with, the democracy we know as Colombia, the oldest democracy in all Latin America, today is the United States' most reliable and trusted partner in Latin America. Its President, President Uribe, is the most popular elected official in the hemisphere. And while this Congress suffers from 15 percent approval ratings, President Uribe in his own country enjoys 80 percent approval ratings. Why? Because he's made a difference in reducing violence and winning the war against the FARC and the narcoterrorists. Today, 71 percent of Colombians say they are more secure under President Uribe. Seventy-three percent of Colombians say Uribe respects human rights. Homicides are down. Kidnappings are down. Today the murder rate in Colombia is the lowest in 15 years. In fact, Medellin, once considered one of the most dangerous cities in the world, today has a lower murder rate than Washington, DC, or Baltimore.

Now there are those who oppose President Uribe. There are those who

oppose the trade promotion agreement between the United States and Colombia. They argue that President Uribe just has not done enough on the issue of labor and protecting labor leaders from violence. Well, let's look at the facts. Under President Uribe, he's totally reformed the judiciary, the entire institution. For the general prosecutor, he's added 2,166 new positions, including 418 new prosecutors and 545 new investigators, and increased funding for the general prosecutor, the federal independent prosecutor, by 75 percent. Carlos Rodriguez, president of the United Workers Confederation of Colombia, said about this: "Never in the history of Colombia have we achieved something so important."

I would note that President Uribe has also created special programs today to protect labor leaders. In fact, they spent almost \$39 million this past year for body guards and protection for labor union members. There are 1,500 labor union leaders and activists who receive special protection, the second largest protected group in the entire country, and this program has been successful. In fact, no labor leader has lost their life who's been under this protection program. In fact, the murder rate, which is a terrible thing, for labor and union activists is lower than the national rate for everyone else. So tremendous progress has been made.

The International Labor Organization has removed Colombia from its labor watch list. Colombia has agreed to a permanent ILO representative in Colombia, and 14 labor union leaders representing 14 labor unions in Colombia have endorsed this agreement.

Now we continue to hear from opponents and they are really the people who have always traditionally opposed trade and so they've got a different line today, but they always say that President Uribe still has not done enough, we need to demand more, but they never specifically say what more they

□ 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.



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