

appreciation of court reporters across the country.

Court reporters play a critical role in our communities. They are the guardians of our public record. They have unique skills translating the spoken word into text to be recorded for history. They preserve judicial proceedings and assist individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing.

I have seen firsthand the dedication and professionalism shown by court reporters from my time as a special prosecutor in Wisconsin and, more importantly, from my wife Tawni, who has been a court reporter in western Wisconsin for nearly 25 years. I wish her a happy Valentine's Day today.

In addition to the critical role court reporters play in the courtroom, the National Court Reporters Association and its members have made significant contributions to the success of the Veterans History Project. The Veterans History Project, which was created by legislation that I authored, is the largest oral history collection in the world, having collected over 100,000 stories from our Nation's veterans. Their stories are permanently stored at the Library of Congress and are available to the public.

Shortly after the Veterans History Project was launched in 2000, my wife Tawni encouraged court reporters across the country to partner with the Library of Congress to assist in transcribing veterans' stories; and to date, court reporters have submitted over 4,000 oral history transcripts to the Library of Congress. Not only have court reporters been willing to work with the Library of Congress to transcribe stories that had already been submitted, but many court reporters have personally gone and interviewed veterans in their local communities.

For example, last August, at the court reporters' national convention, the National Court Reporters Foundation celebrated Purple Heart Day by interviewing eight Purple Heart recipients for the Veterans History Project. Additionally, the National Court Reporters Foundation recently launched a new program called the Hard-of-Hearing Heroes Project, where veterans with profound hearing loss will be interviewed for the Veterans History Project through the use of realtime captioning.

This is important because, according to the VA, hearing loss is one of the most common service-related injuries, and it is estimated that 60 percent of our veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan suffer some form of hearing loss. The program will help ensure every veteran has a chance to share his or her story.

As we celebrate National Court Reporting and Captioning Week, I want to thank the National Court Reporters Association and its many members throughout the country for their hard work and professionalism. I especially want to thank the court reporters for their significant contributions to the

Veterans History Project and to preserving veterans' stories for generations to come.

VENEZUELA SANCTIONS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) for 5 minutes.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, yesterday the new administration, including Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control, OFAC, took decisive action to hold Venezuelan regime officials accountable for their illicit activity.

The announcement was that two Venezuelan nationals were labeled as "specially designated narcotics traffickers" pursuant to the Kingpin Act, including Venezuela's second in command, the Vice President of Venezuela, and his front man, Lopez Bello. It also identified 13 companies owned or controlled by these individuals or other designated parties that pose a serious threat to U.S. national security as well as the U.S. and global financial systems. These designations were long overdue, Mr. Speaker, and represent a significant first step in what appears to be a positive, fundamental shift in our policy toward Venezuela.

Just yesterday, my colleague MARIO DIAZ-BALART and I met with Vice President PENCE to discuss Venezuela and how Congress and the administration can work together to craft a positive agenda to help the people in Latin America suffering without democracy or human rights.

Last week, Senator BOB MENENDEZ of New Jersey and I led a bipartisan and bicameral letter—together with 32 of our congressional colleagues—to the President urging his administration to take immediate action against the Maduro regime for his illicit activity and for its gross human rights abuses. While this round of sanctions target the illegal drug activities of these officials, this is just the tip of the corruption iceberg in Venezuela, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, Venezuela's so-called Executive Vice President has facilitated drug shipments, has protected drug traffickers in Venezuela, and has alleged links with the U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization and Iranian proxy, Hezbollah. According to OFAC, the Office of Foreign Assets Control, the second individual also sanctioned is Lopez Bello, who laundered drug proceeds and generated significant profits as a result of illegal activities.

Holy Toledo.

While these announced sanctions were a critical first step, it pales in comparison to the dire humanitarian situation that Maduro and his cronies have created for the people of Venezuela. Mr. Speaker, Venezuela has been on a downward spiral for years, and there have been bipartisan calls from Congress to take action in support of the Venezuelan people.

Maduro's failed economic policies have the country with the highest in-

flation rate in the world leaving his people without food, without basic necessities, without medical supplies. In most areas, hospitals and groceries have shut down due to lack of supplies, and the people of Venezuela are forced to ransack what is left of these hospitals and stores for the basic survival of their families.

How does the regime react when they see the suffering of their own citizens? They are lining their own pockets at the expense and the suffering of the Venezuelan people. An AP report showed that senior-level officials like Generals Rodolfo Marco Torres and Carlos Osorio are allegedly orchestrating fraudulent schemes with suspected shell companies to personally profit, instead of bringing food to the people.

Opposition leaders like Leopoldo Lopez and Antonio Ledesma are still in jail or under house arrest. Leaders like Maria Corina Machado of the National Congress is still not allowed to travel outside her country. This is unacceptable, Mr. Speaker. Their so-called crimes: speaking out against the Maduro regime and standing up for democratic principles.

The regime stifles all who stand for democracy and freedom in Venezuela. The opposition is vilified, is persecuted, and is arrested on false charges. We must show Venezuelans that their fight is not in vain, that their actions are seen, and that their cries are heard.

Next on the sanctions list should be the judges and officers of these kangaroo courts in Venezuela who are behind this unwarranted incarceration and are responsible for the injustices and human rights violations.

Mr. Speaker, this is what America is all about. We stand firmly by our values, firmly in our ideals, and we promote and defend them, and we try to have other parts of the world be enlightened in this way.

Hope is dwindling quickly in Venezuela. As human rights violations multiply, now is the time to hold Venezuelan regime officials accountable, and we urge all responsible nations to join us in this struggle.

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LET THE PEOPLE DECIDE

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

Mr. POCAN. Mr. Speaker, if you would have asked me when I first got elected to Congress, would I ever expect to be in a position, months after a Presidential election, about whether or not the integrity of that election was at stake, I would have said "of course not."

Our democracy's strength is that any adult has an equal say in it through their vote; that the wealthiest or the poorest, the youngest or the oldest adult, regardless of their gender, race,