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House of Representatives

The House met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. ROTHFUS).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,
March 1, 2017.

I hereby appoint the Honorable KEITH J. ROTHFUS to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

PAUL D. RYAN,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 3, 2017, 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 1 hour 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 11:50 a.m.

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN CUBA

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

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, appalling human rights violations take place in my native homeland of Cuba on a regular basis and have only gotten worse in the past few years. Just last week, the Castro regime sentenced a man to a year in prison. What was his crime? He did not watch Fidel Castro's funeral on the television. And just a few months ago, Danilo Maldonado,

also known as El Sexto, was arrested for writing "he's gone" on a wall after Fidel Castro's death.

Mr. Speaker, the Cuban people lack the most basic of human rights, and they are punished for any sentiment that is not in accordance with the Castro regime. The former administration of this wonderful country failed the people of Cuba.

Since the change in the Cuba policy, reports show that the humanitarian crisis has only gotten worse on the island. The 2017 Freedom in the World report put out by Freedom House showed that arbitrary arrests were at the highest level in 7 years. The Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation documented a monthly average of 862 arbitrary detentions between January and November of last year.

Raul Castro tries to silence the Cuban people by subjecting human rights defenders, journalists, and peaceful protesters to arbitrary arrest and short-term detentions. Castro also tries to cut any relation between the opposition and outside groups.

Just last week, Mr. Speaker, Luis Almagro, the Secretary General of the Organization of American States, the OAS, was denied entry to Cuba. He was to receive the first Oswaldo Paya Liberty and Life Award. Paya was a human rights activist murdered by the Castro regime just 5 years ago. Almagro was to be presented with the award by Paya's daughter, but the Castro regime called this "an unacceptable provocation"—receiving an award.

Similarly, the former Education Minister of Chile denied entry to Cuba and former Mexican President denied entry to Cuba simply because they planned to meet with true human rights activists and defenders on the island.

I challenge these U.S. congressional delegations that go to Cuba to march with the Ladies in White on any given Sunday. Here they are. Here are their

faces. Will they be brave enough to do so, to march with these defenseless ladies, or do they just want a junket to glamorize Cuba?

Not to mention the many human rights abuses that go unreported, Mr. Speaker. Instead, the Cuban people risk their lives to record abuses, to report them to outside organizations.

The Ladies in White, Las Damas de Blanco, march every Sunday, peacefully protesting the unjust and barbaric imprisonment of dissidents.

Look at these images, Mr. Speaker, and the stories of the women on these posters. They are regularly beaten and arrested, yet they continue fighting for the freedom of their country. Protesters like Xiomara de las Mercedes Cruz Miranda, who has been in prison since last April; or Maria del Carmen Cala Aguilera, in prison since April of 2015; or Juana Castillo Acosta, who was beaten in her own home, and then sentenced to 5 years in house arrest.

There are so many women to highlight, so I will flip the posters.

Here are some other faces and other names: Yunet, Marieta, Jacqueline, Marta, and Aymara Nieto Munoz, right over here, just a handful of the many women who are in prison today in Castro's gulags.

Mr. Speaker, these are just a few of the many who are persecuted daily for opposing the Castro regime. That is their crime. They are simply tossed in jail in Castro's effort to silence the people. But the Cuban people remain strong in the face of the repressive Castro regime. They do not give up hope of seeing a free and democratic Cuba.

I see that same hope, Mr. Speaker, in the eyes of my constituents, Cuban Americans like me and my family, who were given the opportunity to create a life in a country—our country—that stands for everything that Castro is against: freedom of speech, assembly, petition, the rule of law, and democracy.

□ 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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