

APPLAUDING THE MEN AND
WOMEN WHO KEEP AMERICA
MOVING AND RECOGNIZING NA-
TIONAL TRANSPORTATION WEEK

SPEECH OF

HON. ROBERT A. BRADY

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, May 17, 2004

Mr. BRADY of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise to congratulate Chairman YOUNG and Ranking Member OBERSTAR, for introducing H. Con. Res. 420, which properly applauds the men and women who keep our country moving—the American transportation workers.

There can be no doubt that the transportation sector is the most critical sector of our economy. We cannot produce or sell goods, agricultural products or raw materials if we cannot move them throughout our great land, or ship them overseas. And yet, despite the importance of these workers, they now find themselves under attack from within and without. But, their government has, at best, abandoned them in their hour of need. In some cases, the Federal government has actually joined in—and even led—the assault on their safety, their livelihoods and their rights.

Mr. Speaker, we can never forget that the very first victim on September 11, 2001 was a flight attendant, sliced by a box cutter our lax security measures allowed on board. And yet, three years later, these underpaid and overstressed workers find themselves fighting for proper security training and for safer conditions. Will we ever truly honor the dead of that infamous day as long as these citizens are at risk? And today, two years after it expired, the flight attendants of Southwest Airlines continue to work without a contract, victims of the alliance between management and the National Mediation Board (NMB), the agency responsible for administering the Railway Labor Act (RLA) which governs their work class. Management has refused to offer a new contract after the rejection of woefully inadequate opening offers. However, NMB has refused to declare an impasse, which would allow workers and the Transport Workers Union, which represents them, to move forward in exercising their rights.

And the Southwest Flight attendants are not the only victims of the recalcitrance of the NMB. Despite the fact that the current round of national rail negotiations is well into its fifth year for thousands of workers, the NMB has refused to move the bargaining process along in a timely manner. Specifically, the NMB has refused to “release” the International Association of Machinists (IAM) and the Sheet Metal Workers International Union (SMWIA) from mediation despite the fact that both unions have reached an impasse with management and further talks would be fruitless. It is intolerable for our government to force a rail worker to wait five years for a new collective bargaining agreement.

The NMB, whose three members are appointed by the President and confirmed by the other body, is responsible for providing bargaining and mediation assistance, and fostering productive collective bargaining between labor and management. The NMB’s ability to either advance or delay labor-management talks is a power the agency should use fairly and with great care. The NMB is well known

for touting its own record of having parties reach agreements without resorting to “self-help” such as strikes or lockouts.

In fact, the statute has survived since 1926 because it can work well if implemented fairly. But by failing to act on a release in the JAM and SMWIA case, the NMB is ignoring its own policy of expediting the bargaining and mediation process. Forcing employees and their unions to stay at the table well beyond the point of any productive negotiations frustrates the rights of workers and denies settlements within a reasonable time frame. The problems surrounding these excessive delays have little to do with the RLA, but rather with the manner in which the NMB administers the process. By failing to change the endless cycle of delay in rail bargaining, the NMB is denying basic due process. In other words, justice delayed is justice denied.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to truly honor America’s transportation workers by helping to make them safe on their jobs and secure in their contracts.

BURMA

HON. MARK E. SOUDER

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 19, 2004

Mr. SOUDER. Mr. Speaker, this week, the military dictators in Burma opened a “constitutional convention” whose purported aim is to establish democracy in Burma. Anyone who has followed the situation in Burma knows that the brutal dictators of the State Peace and Democracy Council (SPDC) are the last people who should be guiding the democratic process.

While on the one hand, the SPDC talks of democracy and peace among Burma’s ethnic and political groups, it continues to terrorize these same groups, impress people into forced labor for the military, and imprison those working for democratic change. This constitutional convention is a deception designed to give the perception of democracy while maintaining maximum military control.

While the SPDC organizes its constitutional convention, the legal and duly elected leader of Burma, Aung San Suu Kyi remains under house arrest. Nearly one year ago, the SPDC engineered an unprovoked attack on Aung San Suu Kyi’s motorcade as she traveled throughout Burma spreading her message of freedom and democracy. In the aftermath of the attack, she was taken into custody for her own safety—at least that is what the Burmese military wants us to believe.

Wherever she goes crowds gather to hear her message. Despite the danger of attending these rallies, the Burmese people do not care. Countless Burmese of all ethnic persuasions look to Aung San Suu Kyi as the very heart and soul of the Burmese democracy movement. The credibility and charisma of Aung San Suu Kyi cannot be denied; it cannot be sold; it cannot be bought. It comes only from standing up for what is right.

To be sure, the movement is bigger than one person, but Aung San Suu Kyi has led the forces of democracy in Burma for many years. On many occasions, she could have left Burma behind, but at great personal sacrifice, she has remained. She provides a shining ex-

ample of standing tall and standing firm in the face of relentless opposition and hardship. And although she has been in prison or under house arrest for 9 of the last 15 years, her commitment to freedom, democracy, and a better life in Burma has never wavered and never faltered. She is the public face of thousands of men, women, and children who have suffered unspeakably harsh conditions and who remain prisoners in their own country.

As leader of the National League for Democracy, it would seem natural that Aung San Suu Kyi and NLD Vice Chairman Tin Oo, who is also in the hands of Burma’s merciless thugs, would attend the convention. Shamefully, the SPDC has refused to release either freedom fighter before, during, or after the convention.

Equally regrettable is that the SPDC has refused to allow NLD offices to reopen around the country. The SPDC has also failed to clarify procedures of discussion and has limited the parameters for discussion. The convention is being held in grim isolation with limited access by outside observers. In short, the SPDC is so tightly controlling the convention that it would seem that the participants can only rubber stamp the SPDC’s agenda. That is not democracy; that is dictatorship.

The National League for Democracy is boycotting the convention, and I support that decision. Participation in such an obvious fraud can only undermine all for which the NLD is working.

Democracy in Burma is a goal that cannot be compromised. The United States believes in that goal. American sanctions on Burma have had a profoundly positive impact over the last year. Reports coming from inside Burma and from groups knowledgeable about the situation in that country have praised the tough stance the United States has taken against the dictatorship in Rangoon.

Our tough stance is in danger of faltering unless the sanctions are renewed during this Congress. H.J. Res. 95, which has 46 bipartisan co-sponsors, approves the renewal of American sanctions and show our continuing commitment to freedom, liberty, and emancipation from tyranny. I urge all of my colleagues to fight for the passage of this important resolution.

If the daylight of freedom feels like it’s a long way off, it will be even longer unless the United States stands side by side with Aung San Suu Kyi, the NLD, and the people of Burma struggling under the heavy yoke of oppression and cruelty.

HONORING THE SPIRIT OF CUBAN
FREEDOM

HON. ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 19, 2004

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, 102 years ago, Cuba achieved its hard-fought independence from the tyranny of Spanish imperialism. This moment of triumph and relief ushered in a new era of freedom, a republican age. The ideals of self-government had trumped despotic rule, and all were captivated by the promise of enduring liberty. May 20, 1902 immediately assumed a profound significance for the Cuban nation, melding a fierce