

Central America. Nonetheless, it has a literacy rate of over 90 percent, an average life expectancy of 67 years, and a diverse background of religious and racial groups. With a gross domestic product of \$1.778 billion and a third of the population living below the poverty line, Belize still faces many challenges to its economic development and stability.

Nonetheless, the government of Belize has worked to nurture and support business relationships with the United States. Its leaders have reached out to the American government to find mechanisms for tackling the issues of homeland and domestic security needs. It has shown considerable willingness to assist in the reduction of drug trafficking from the country and has worked impressively to address the health care needs and concerns of its citizens.

More still should be done to assist the people of Belize as they pursue means of economic and social advancement and tackle the crippling problems facing smaller nations. As they have reached out to us in the pursuit of answers and support to their problems, we should recognize the need for assistance and aid in their development. I believe that it is important that the U.S. Government continues to develop a strong relationship with our Belizean neighbors. Our global connectedness and shared interests are important causes that unite us today and will continue to draw us closer together.

I therefore submit for the RECORD a copy of The Hill's op-ed column written by Ambassador Lisa Shoman, discussing the connectedness and relationship between the small but important country of Belize and the United States. I hope my colleagues understand the significance of nurturing this relationship and continuing to build an ever closer relationship with the nation of Belize.

BELIZE: SMALL COUNTRY, BIG PROGRESS

While media attention has been firmly focused on the proposed Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement, a regional success story that has captured virtually no attention is unfolding.

The small nation of Belize (that I have the privilege of representing in Washington) has made significant strides over the past few years that have strengthened the bilateral relationship with the United States and attracted the attention of America's business community.

Belize, a nation of about 275,000 people situated at the crossroads of Central America and the Caribbean, is a staunch friend of America; a solid, strong and peaceful democracy with an independent judiciary; and a nation open and welcoming to the American private sector. It became a British Crown colony in 1862 and achieved independence in 1981.

Our two nations have had a long history of cordial relations. The United States is the home to the largest expatriate Belizean community in the world, some 150,000 strong, and thousands of American tourists visit my country each year, either by air or by cruise ship.

But there is a more profound reason for why the nations are so close: The dedication of both governments to common objectives has naturally led to an increasingly cooperative and productive diplomatic relationship. Belize shares the central U.S. goals of eradicating terrorism, bolstering security, combating the scourges of drugs and international crime and protecting human rights. And we have put real action and effort to these tasks.

Over just the past three to four years, Belize has agreed in principle to sign the

Proliferation Security Initiative, a key initiative of the Bush administration intended to impede or stop shipments of weapons of mass destruction. Our ports were upgraded to meet the International Maritime Organization's International Shipping and Ports Security Code. Our Cabinet has approved the Agreement Concerning Cooperation in Suppressing Illicit Maritime and Air Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances in the Caribbean Area (CRA), a key objective of the U.S. government. The CRA will not only pay dividends in reducing drug trafficking but also assist law-enforcement cooperation in areas such as arms smuggling and money laundering.

Our two governments' determination to stamp out the drug trade yielded a concrete success last December in the conviction of a Belizean gang leader for multi-ton cocaine-importation offenses. The success of the operation was made possible through the cooperative efforts of the U.S. Attorney's Office in New York City and officials in the Belizean Office of Public Prosecutions and our Police Department.

We have acceded to the U.N. Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, and we are committed to work together to stamp out all forms of human slavery. Our two nations have signed and brought into force an extradition treaty and a mutual legal-assistance treaty intended to strengthen law-enforcement cooperation.

This fast-paced diplomatic activity is not only a direct result of the excellent relations between Belize and the United States but also an important expression of my country's fundamental commitment to the principle of the rule of law and of the necessity for a rules-based world.

That commitment governs Belize's relationship with her international investors and commercial firms operating in and with the country. And the results speak for themselves.

We are a beneficiary of the Caribbean Basin Initiative, and the United States is our largest trading partner. Two-way trade reached about \$259 million in 2004 and, according to early 2005 statistics, is over 35 percent greater this year than over the corresponding period in 2004.

The United States has consistently enjoyed a trade surplus. Our investment levels have also grown. The World Bank reports that from 2002 to 2003 (latest figures available) net inflows of foreign direct investment have increased by 60 percent.

These are encouraging numbers but clearly are below Belize's potential. We are focused on lifting trade and investment levels and believe that we shall, given the foundation we have already built.

Foreign investors are hardheaded businesspeople. They will not move into a country if the conditions are not right. The 2005 Index of Economic Freedom, jointly produced by the Heritage Foundation and The Wall Street Journal, is of particular interest to any investor. This careful analysis shows Belize outranking virtually all nations with which the United States is currently negotiating a free-trade-area agreement or providing funding through the U.S. government's Millennium Challenge Corp.

The Belizean Constitution provides for an independent judiciary and, according to the State Department's Report on Human Rights Practices, the government generally respects this provision in practice. The report certifies that people accused of civil or criminal offenses have constitutional rights to presumption of innocence, protection against self-incrimination, defense by counsel, a public trial and appeal. Belize has a Freedom of

Information Act and an independent ombudsman who acts as a check on government power.

Abuses occur in every country. The report noted that when instances of alleged inappropriate behavior by a government agency arose, the matters were settled under the rule of law and due process.

Belize is making significant progress, strengthening its commitment to a secure world, helping the United States in our common cause to fight terrorism, protecting human rights and promoting and welcoming trade and investment.

Belize is a small country with much to offer the United States and its investors. We pledge to work with Congress and the U.S. business community so that you will get to know us better.

THANKING CITY OF TRENTON, ILLINOIS

HON. JOHN SHIMKUS

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 21, 2005

Mr. SHIMKUS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to both congratulate and express my gratitude to the City of Trenton, Illinois for hosting the Illinois State Junior Legion Baseball Tournament for 2005.

American Legion baseball gives youth an opportunity to understand teamwork, discipline, and leadership through experience in the sport. It helps our youth build personal physical fitness and leadership skills. I am delighted to see the support City of Trenton is providing the youth of Illinois in hosting this tournament.

I welcome all those participating in the tournament to southern Illinois. I wish each of the teams the best as they participate in the 2005 Illinois State Junior Legion Baseball Tournament.

A TRIBUTE TO COL. MICHAEL J. SMITH

HON. JERRY LEWIS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 21, 2005

Mr. LEWIS of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Colonel Michael J. Smith, Project Manager Soldier Weapons, for his support of our Soldiers in their ongoing war on terrorism and in particular for his innovative approach to shortening the acquisition cycle for critical new weapon systems. Of particular note was his success in rapidly fielding the Common Remotely Operated Weapon Station (CROWS). Through his vision and calculated risk taking, he has rapidly fielded this and other systems which have demonstrably led to the saving Soldier and civilian lives in Iraq. This has been a true force protection success story and a force multiplier for the Army.

Col. Smith's innovations benefit Soldiers, policy makers, and tax payers by streamlining the costly test and acquisition process. His wise use of tax dollars resulted in Soldiers receiving the best possible equipment and enabling the rapid fielding of new technologies to enhance soldier capability while ensuring soldier safety. Through his leadership, Col. Smith