Democrats, too, because he has remained an opponent of Colombia. Democratic hard-liners have sized on the synergy that House Democrats asked for in their initiative to demobilize 30,000 right-wing paramilitary fighters. The murder rate has dropped by nearly half and kidnappings by 75 percent. For the first time thugs guilty of massacres and other human rights crimes are being brought to justice, and the political system is being cleansed of its worst elements. With the necessary conditions for investment, the free-market economy is booming.

In a region where populist demagogues are on the rise, Mr. Uribe stands out as a defender of liberal democracy, not to mention a staunch ally of the United States. So it was remarkable to see the treatment that the Colombian president received in Washington. After a meeting with the Democratic congressional leadership, Mr. Uribe was publicly scolded by House Majority leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), whose statement made no mention of the “friendship” she recently offered Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad. "Your Watch, which has joined the Democratic campaign against Mr. Uribe, claimed that "today Colombia presents the worst human rights and humanitarian situation in the Western Hemisphere—never mind Venezuela or Cuba or Haiti. Former vice president Al Gore, who has advocated direct U.S. negotiations with the regimes of Kim Jong II and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, recently canceled a meeting with Mr. Uribe because, Mr. Gore said, he found the Colombian’s record “deeply troubling.”

What could explain this backlash? Democrats claim to be concerned—far more so than Colombians, apparently—with “televisions” that the influence of right-wing paramilitary groups extended deep into the military and Congress. In fact this has been well-known for years; what’s new is that investigations by Colombia’s Supreme Court and attorney general have resulted in the jailing and prosecution of politicians and security officials. Many of those implicated came from Mr. Uribe’s Conservative Party, and his former intelligence chief is under investigation. But the president himself has not been charged with wrongdoing. On the contrary: His implies 20,000 right-wing paramilitary fighters last year paved the way for the current investigations, which he and his government have supported and funded.

In fact, most of those who attack Mr. Uribe for the “parapolitics” affair have opposed him all along, and for very different reasons. Some, like Sen. Patrick J. Leahy (D-Vt.), reflexively resist U.S. military aid to Latin America. Colombia has received more in economic and military aid from the Clinton and Bush administrations to fight drug traffickers and the guerrillas, and it hopes to receive $3.9 billion more in the next six years. Some, like Rep. Sander M. Levin (D-Mich.), are eager to torpedo Colombia’s pending free-trade agreement with the United States. Now that the Bush strategy has conceded almost everything that House Democrats asked for in order to pass pending trade deals, protectionist hard-liners have sized on the supposed “crisis” in blackball Colombia.

Perhaps Mr. Uribe is being punished by Democrats, too, because he has remained an ally of both as President Bush’s hand, Venezuela’s Hugo Chavez, portrays the U.S. president as “the devil.” Whatever the reason, the Democratic campaign is badly misguided. If the Democrats succeed in wound Mr. Uribe or thwarting his attempt to consolidate a democracy that builds its economy through free trade, the United States may have to live without any Latin American allies.

2007 NATIONAL TEACHER DAY

Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, today I recognize May 8, 2007 as National Teacher Day. Teachers play a vital role in our society. They are a driving force in the course our great Nation takes. The molding of a new generation is their task. Yet teachers willingly accept the challenge with open arms. Being a former math teacher, I know the great challenges teachers face every day. Teachers often have thankless jobs, getting little appreciation for the myriad of tasks they do on a daily basis. They tie shoes, wipe noses, dab tears, and provide comfort all without asking for anything in return. Teachers are disciplinarians, educators, and friends. Their job is truly invaluable and priceless. Teachers give each student a tool-box full of essential tools to use, training them for life’s situations that might come their way. These tools give students the confidence to face each day prepared for living.

Historian Henry Adams said, “A teacher affects eternity: he can never tell where his influence stops.” I couldn’t agree more. Educators all over the country teach and train America’s next generation. Students are given direction and guidance for their futures from their teachers. Teachers can be very influential in the lives of their students, and thus influence generations of people to come.

Let me take this opportunity to recognize Ms. Tiong for her recent nomination for the National Teacher of the Year Award. Ms. Tiong is a special education teacher at Dulce Elementary School in Dulce, NM, and has taught for 8 years. She is a shining example of all that teachers strive to be: challenging and compassionate. I thank Ms. Tiong today for her great service and wish her many more years of teaching and training America’s youth. Join me today in saying thank you to our teachers for all they do. They deserve our thanks and support. Thank you, teachers, for every life you have touched and every life you will touch in the future.

THE MATTHEW SHEPARD ACT OF 2007

Mr. SMITH. Mr. President, I wish to speak about the need for hate crimes legislation. Each Congress, Senator Kennedy and I introduce hate crimes legislation that would add new categories to current hate crimes law, sending a signal that violence of any kind is unacceptable in our society. Likewise, each Congress I have come to the floor to highlight a separate hate crime that has occurred in our country.

On August 22, 2002, in San Francisco, CA, Jack Broughton and his female companion, Jean Earl, beat two women outside a gay poetry event. Police reported that Earl began kicking and punching people while shouting antigay epithets at the event’s participants. After being kicked out, Broughton and Earl beat a 34-year-old woman outside. Broughton then punched the first victim’s partner, who joined in the scuffle. The first victim suffered minor injuries, for which she was treated at a hospital. According to reports, the victim’s partner was attacked solely because of their sexual orientation.

I believe that the Government’s first duty is to defend its citizens, to defend them against the harms that come out of hate. The Matthew Shepard Act is a symbol that can become substance. I believe that by passing this legislation and changing current law, we can change hearts and minds as well.

 amendment to the Prescription Drug User Fee Amendment Act of 2007. S. 1010, to Senator Dorgan’s prescription drug importation amendment, S.A. 900. The two bills would be combined into a legislative package and sent to the Senate by a 49 to 40 vote. The second vote was on the motion to invoke cloture on the committee substitute vote explanation.

Mr. OBAMA. Mr. President, yesterday, the Senate took two rollcall votes. The first vote was on Senator Cochran’s second degree amendment, S.A. 1010, to Senator Dorgan’s prescription drug importation amendment, S.A. 900. The two bills would be combined into a legislative package and sent to the Senate by a 49 to 40 vote. The second vote was on the motion to invoke cloture on the committee substitute vote explanation.

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