

world. Last week, as he visited Washington, a poll showed his approval rating at 80.4 percent—extraordinary for a politician who has been in office nearly five years. Colombians can easily explain this: Since his first election in 2002, Mr. Uribe has rescued their country from near-failed-state status, doubling the size of the army and extending the government's control to large areas that for decades were ruled by guerrillas and drug traffickers. 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 purged of their allies. With more secure conditions for investment, the free-market economy is booming.

In a region where populist demagogues are on the offensive, 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. Human Rights Watch, which has joined the Democratic campaign against Mr. Uribe, claimed that "today Colombia presents the worst human rights and humanitarian crisis 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 "revelations" 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 come 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 initiative to demobilize 30,000 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 than \$5 billion 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 administration has conceded almost everything that House Democrats asked for in order to pass pending trade deals, protectionist hard-liners have sized on the supposed human rights "crisis" as a pretext to blackball Colombia.

Perhaps Mr. Uribe is being punished by Democrats, too, because he has remained an ally of George W. Bush even as his neighbor, Venezuela's Hugo Chavez, portrays the U.S. president as "the devil." Whatever the rea-

sons, the Democratic campaign is badly misguided. If the Democrats succeed in wounding 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 this great Nation takes. The molding of young minds is a daunting 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 toolbox full of essential tools to use, training them for many of 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. Tamara 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 what all teachers strive to be: challenging, encouraging, 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.

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. 990. The Cochran amendment passed the Senate by a 49 to 40 vote. The second vote was on the motion to invoke cloture on the committee substitute

amendment to the Prescription Drug User Fee Amendment Act of 2007, S. 1082, which was agreed to by an 82 to 8 vote.

Although I was unable to be present for these two votes, I would like to state for the record how I would have voted. I would have opposed Senator COCHRAN's amendment which requires the Secretary of HHS to certify that drug importation would not pose any safety risk to consumers. As a matter of practice, the Secretary is not able to certify that any drug from any facility, here in the United States or abroad, would not pose a safety risk. As such, this amendment effectively would block the implementation of Senator DORGAN's amendment.

The fact that the Cochran amendment passed is unfortunate. It is unconscionable that Americans are paying on average twice as much for life-saving drugs as citizens of other countries, and our State and Federal health programs are struggling to bear these costs.

Finally, my HELP Committee colleagues have spent months negotiating and drafting the Prescription Drug User Fee Amendment Act, which contains a number of critical reauthorizing and drug safety provisions. I would have voted in favor of cloture on this bill and look forward to its passage later this week.

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 anti-gay 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 were 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.