

HONORING DENNIS KING ON THE OCCASION OF HIS RETIREMENT FROM PUBLIC SERVICE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HARE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. HARE. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize my Chief of Staff, Dennis King, who is retiring from the House of Representatives after 33 years of distinguished public service.

Dennis, a native of Miami, Florida, first came to Congress as a Special Assistant to the late Representative Dante Fascell. He then served as Chief of Staff for my friend and predecessor, Representative Lane Evans.

When I asked Dennis to continue in the same role on my staff, he enthusiastically accepted, saying he felt like he had "unfinished business to take care of." Dennis' decision to extend his service shows his dedication, not only to the people of the 17th District of Illinois, but to working families and to veterans everywhere.

Dennis and I have been very close friends for over 25 years. We share the same values. Some might wonder how Dennis, a Duke University graduate with a Georgetown law degree, could form such a close bond with me, a factory worker from West Central Illinois. It's simple. Dennis cares about the people of the 17th District as much as I do.

When Congressman Evans hired me to be his District Director and Dennis was my supervisor, he had faith in me from day 1, serving as a mentor and pulling me from the edge of the cliff during the times I lost my way. I will always be grateful for the chance Dennis gave me.

And Dennis is also a congenial and friendly person. Current and former staff say they will miss sitting in his office talking about everything from politics to family to sports. No matter what time of day or how busy Dennis was, he always put down whatever he was doing the minute someone walked into his office. The care and attention he gave to every single person is one of the major reasons he's so beloved.

Another trait I admire in Dennis is his brilliant political mind. I asked him to be my Chief of Staff because, as a new Member of Congress, I knew I needed someone who understood Capitol Hill inside and out, and whom I could trust to keep me on the right path. Dennis has amazed me with his intuitions, decision-making and loyalty, always choosing the right course for the people of my district and this Nation.

It cannot go without saying that when one thinks of Dennis King, one thinks of Lane Evans and vice versa. The two men were like brothers, a friendship that started when they attended law school at Georgetown University. And together they made history fighting for veterans and working families across our Nation.

Dennis often mentions how much he learned from Lane, but the truth is

that Dennis taught Lane so much as well. He was an integral part of all the great things Lane was able to accomplish.

I want to also acknowledge Dennis' family, his wife, Nancy, and his two sons, Steven and Jeffrey. As most of you know, the job of Chief of Staff can take a toll on one's family. The time commitment is great and the stress can be overwhelming. Nancy has demonstrated remarkable patience over the years and remains an incredible source of support for Dennis. Next year Dennis and Nancy will celebrate their silver wedding anniversary, a true testament to their love and respect for each other. I wish them both the best in whatever life brings them.

And Dennis, although I say this with a heavy heart, congratulations on your retirement. Thank you for your service, your laughs, your hard work. Your efforts and advice have allowed us to accomplish many great things in my first term and have ultimately made me a much better Member of this body. Your spirit, humor, intelligence and the ease by which you led the Hare team will be missed.

Best of luck, and please keep in touch.

God bless.

COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. WELLER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WELLER of Illinois. Madam Speaker, I submit for the RECORD an editorial from yesterday's Washington Post in support of the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement, as well as a column by Edward Schumacher-Matos, a former foreign correspondent for the Times, as well as a visiting professor of Latin American Studies at Harvard, a column that was published in yesterday's New York Times as well.

[From the Washington Post, Mar. 31, 2008]

FREE COLOMBIA: A TRADE PACT EVERYONE CAN LOVE

Sometime after Congress returns from Easter recess this week, President Bush is likely to present the Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement for the approval of the House and Senate. As we have said, the proposed pact is good policy for both Colombia and the United States. Colombia has long enjoyed periodically renewable tariff-free access to the U.S. market; the agreement would make that permanent. In exchange, U.S. producers would, for the first time, get the same tariff-free deal when they export to Colombia. Meanwhile, the agreement contains labor and environmental protections much like those that Congress has already approved in a U.S.-Peru trade pact. A vote for the Colombia deal would show Latin America that a staunch U.S. ally will be rewarded for improving its human rights record and resisting the anti-American populism of Venezuela's Hugo Chávez.

Sending the agreement to the House of Representatives without the prior approval of Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) would be risky for the president; usually, the execu-

tive and legislative branches tee up such votes cooperatively. But months of Democratic resistance to the Colombia deal may have left Mr. Bush no choice. The agreement is being held hostage by members of the House (and Senate) who argue that Colombia—despite a dramatic drop in its overall murder toll under the leadership of President Alvaro Uribe—hasn't done enough to protect trade union activists or to punish past murders of labor leaders. It's a spurious complaint: Actually, in 2006, union members were slightly less likely than the average Colombian to be murdered. But the human rights issue has served as cover for many Democrats whose true objections are to free trade itself.

Once the agreement arrives on the Hill, Congress will have 90 legislative days to vote yes or no—no amendments and no filibusters allowed, because special "fast track" rules apply. The Bush administration is betting that enough Democrats would support the pact to ensure its passage in the House, if it ever comes up for a vote. Of course, Ms. Pelosi could make an issue of the president's failure to get her approval to submit the pact and then could have her caucus shoot down the deal. But she could also engage the White House in serious negotiations. The president has signaled a willingness to consider reauthorizing aid for workers displaced by trade, legislation that is dear to the Democrats' labor constituency and that he has heretofore resisted.

Ms. Pelosi recently said that no Colombia deal could pass without trade adjustment assistance—without also mentioning the bogus trade unionists issue. Perhaps she is realizing that talking to Mr. Bush about swapping a Colombia vote for trade adjustment assistance might actually lead to a tangible accomplishment. At least we have to hope so.

KILLING A TRADE PACT

(By Edward Schumacher-Matos)

President Bush has been urging Congress to approve a pending trade agreement with Colombia, an ally that recently almost went to war with Venezuela and Hugo Chávez. Even though the agreement includes the labor and environmental conditions that Congress wanted, many Democrats, including Senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, now say that Colombia must first punish whomever has been assassinating the members of the nation's trade unions before the agreement can pass.

An examination of the Democrats' claims, however, finds that their faith in the assertions of human-rights groups is more righteous than right. Union members have been assassinated, but the reported number is highly exaggerated. Even one murder for union organizing is atrocious, but isolated killings do not justify holding up the trade agreement.

All sides agree that trade-union murders in Colombia, like all violence, have declined drastically in recent years. The Colombian unions' own research center says killings dropped to 39 last year from a high of 275 in 1996.

Yet in a report being released next week, the research center says the killings remain "systematic" and should be treated by the courts as "genocide" designed to "exterminate" unionism in Colombia. Most human-rights groups cite the union numbers and conclude, as Human Rights Watch did this year, that "Colombia has the highest rate of violence against trade unionists in the world."

Even if that is true, it was far safer to be in a union than to be an ordinary citizen in Colombia last year. The unions report that