

administration and Congress was justified because bin Laden and al Qaeda were responsible for 9/11. But now bin Laden is dead; al Qaeda is disbursed all around the world.

Beside me is a poster of an honor guard carrying a flag-draped coffin off a plane at Dover Air Force Base. To accompany the photo, I will read into the RECORD an editorial from Bob Schieffer titled "The Real Cost of War":

[I was in an airport lounge the other day when I saw a woman across the way. Why I kept staring, I don't know. Maybe it was just that she seemed so sad. And then I understood. And I looked away, hoping she had not seen me stare. Because in her lap was an American flag, neatly folded into a triangle and placed in a clear plastic case, a flag folded the way it always is when it is given to a soldier's family as the soldier's coffin is lowered into the grave.

I figured her to be a soldier's mother, and I couldn't help but wonder what memories that flag evoked as she held it there. Did it remind her of the first time she had seen her child in the delivery room, or was it the memory of seeing him go off to school that first day, or when he brought home the prize from the science fair, or maybe made the touchdown, or gave her the first Valentine when he wrote out, "Mommy, I love you."

I keep thinking about all the talk in Washington about the high cost of defense and how we have to cut the Pentagon budget before it bankrupts the country. But as I watched that woman, budgets seemed to be such a small part of all of it. No, the real cost of war is not what we pay in dollars and cents. The real cost is what we take from a mother who is left with just a memory and a neatly folded flag in a clear plastic case.]

This was over a year ago, and I want to thank Bob Schieffer. I don't think it can be said better than what he said that day, which I just read into the RECORD.

Why this Congress continues to complain about budgets and cuts and deficits and debts, and our young men and women are walking the roads of Afghanistan, getting their legs blown off and getting killed, and we sit here in Congress and don't bring it up as an issue.

I want to thank my friends on both sides of the aisle and the Republicans on this side of the aisle who are trying to say to Mr. Obama, No, don't leave them there until 2014. Karzai is a crook. He is a corrupt leader. You are spending \$10 billion a month in Afghanistan, and you can't even audit the books in Afghanistan. And kids are dying. Yet right here in America, we are cutting programs for children to get a pint of milk in school; and we are saying to a senior citizen, No sandwich at the senior citizens center because we can't afford it. But, Mr. Karzai, we will send you \$10 billion.

Mr. Speaker, it's borrowed money. It's not even Uncle Sam's money. It's probably Uncle Chang's money. But more importantly than the money is what Bob Schieffer said: It's the pain of war. And this Congress needs to come together and say to Mr. Obama, Let's bring them home this year, next year, but not wait until 2014, 2015.

Mr. Speaker, I will close, as I always do on the floor of the House, please,

God, bless our men and women in uniform. Please, God, bless the families of our men and women in uniform. Please, God, in your loving arms, hold the families who have given a child dying for freedom in Afghanistan and Iraq. I ask God to bless the House and the Senate that we will do what is right in the eyes of God for its people. I ask God to give wisdom, strength, and courage to President Obama, that he will do what is right in the eyes of God's people. And I will say three times, God please, God please, God please continue to bless America.

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COLOMBIAN WORKERS CONSTANTLY THREATENED AND AT RISK

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MCGOVERN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, I was in Colombia at the end of August with a delegation organized by the Washington Office on Latin America.

In Medellin, we met with the National Labor School, or ENS, to discuss the current labor situation in Colombia. Their reports on threatened and murdered unionists are internationally recognized; and because of this, ENS faces constant threats and efforts to discredit them.

While not at the levels of the early 2000s, violence against Colombia's workers continues. It is persistent and frequent. It is a reality that cannot be denied, and it is meant to silence people. At least 40 trade unionists have been murdered since President Santos took office last year.

One benchmark in the Colombia Labor Action Plan is for the attorney general's office to meet with ENS and determine how to address the more than 2,900 cases of murdered unionists, of which 90 percent remain in impunity. The first meeting happened in May, but there's been no second meeting. In Bogota, I met with Deputy Attorney General Juan Carlos Forero. I asked him when the next meeting would happen, and he said "imminently." Five weeks later, still no meeting.

Last week, Human Rights Watch sent a study to Colombian Attorney General Viviane Morales. It says "virtually no progress" has been made in getting convictions for killings of labor activists that have occurred in just the past 4½ years. So virtually no progress on recent murders of labor activists, and little progress on past cases.

Mr. Speaker, I met with port workers, campesinos, workers on palm oil plantations, and petroleum and factory workers. Their reality is filled with risk, threats, and even death. They are not valued as human beings, Colombian citizens, or productive members of society. In Cartagena, port workers went on strike in March. Their working con-

ditions are inhumane, and they are forced to work under various subcontracting schemes. These contracts deny them basic benefits and keep them in constant uncertainty about whether they will be working next week or even the next day. They just want the right to negotiate their contracts directly with their employers, the port associations.

The port workers ended their strike after just a few days because the Santos government promised to facilitate talks between the workers and the port associations. But nothing happened. Nothing changed. In fact, some things are worse. As part of the LAP, the most common subcontracting scheme, the so-called "cooperatives," was abolished, except nothing was done to facilitate direct contracting between workers and their employers. So a new scheme has popped up called "simplified joint stock companies," or SAS. Good-bye cooperatives, hello SAS. Meet the new boss; worse than the old boss.

The government has done little to help, unfortunately. When I asked Vice President Garzon about the port workers, he promised to meet again with their union leader. Mr. Speaker, it's not the workers he needs to meet with and convince to negotiate. It's the presidents of the port associations.

Oil workers from Meta showed me photographs and documents describing poor living and working conditions, unfair contracts, and how the Canadian Venezuelan oil company, Pacific Rubiales, acts like a sovereign government on Colombian soil, destroying public roads, firing workers for organizing, and calling in security forces to tear gas striking workers. I'm sure it's not the whole picture, but once again striking workers returned to work because the government promised to open talks with the company. Again, all the workers are asking for is the right to negotiate directly with the company about their contracts and their living and working conditions, and once again the Colombian Government let the workers down.

In September, the strike was renewed, more explosive on all sides than the last one, because nothing had changed since July. Bruno Moro, the U.N. delegate in Colombia, called on everyone to come to the table and resolve the crisis, describing the conflict as the result of no one creating conditions for dialogue. The workers have again returned to work because of agreements by the government to open talks with the company. This time, I hope the government keeps its word.

Mr. Speaker, nothing I saw in Colombia indicated things have changed for the better on the ground for Colombia's workers. Before we take up the FTA, we must demand concrete improvements in labor rights and security for Colombia's workers. Whatever we're doing now isn't working, it isn't making a difference, and it simply isn't enough.

[From Associated Press, Oct. 2, 2011]
 STUDY: COLOMBIA ANTI-UNION VIOLENCE
 UNDETERRED
 (By Frank Bajak)

BOGOTA, COLOMBIA.—A new study challenges claims from the administration of President Barack Obama that Colombia is making important strides in bringing to justice killers of labor activists and so deserves U.S. congressional approval of a long-stalled free trade pact.

The Human Rights Watch study found “virtually no progress” in getting convictions for killings that have occurred in the past 4½ years.

It counted just six convictions obtained by a special prosecutions unit from 195 slayings between January 2007 and May 2011, with nearly nine in 10 of the unit’s cases from that period in preliminary stages with no suspect formally identified.

Democrats in the U.S. Congress have long resisted bringing the Colombia trade pact to a vote, citing what they said is insufficient success in halting such killings.

The White House disagrees, and says Colombia has made significant progress in addressing anti-unionist violence.

It is pushing for congressional approval as early as this week of the Colombia agreement along with pacts with South Korea and Panama, something the Republicans endorse and that they say will increase U.S. exports by \$13 billion a year and support tens of thousands of jobs.

U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk recently said the trade agreements are “an integral part of the President’s plan to create jobs here at home.”

But in Colombia, the world’s most lethal country for labor organizing, the killings haven’t stopped. At least 38 trade unionists have been slain since President Juan Manuel Santos took office in August 2010, says Colombia’s National Labor School.

“A major reason for this ongoing violence has been the chronic lack of accountability for cases of anti-union violence,” Human Rights Watch said in a letter sent Thursday to Colombian Chief Prosecutor Viviane Morales that details the study’s findings.

Convictions have been obtained for less than 10 percent of the 2,886 trade unionists killed since 1986, and the rights group said it found “severe shortcomings” in the work of a special unit of Morales’ office established five years ago to solve the slayings. The letter says the unit has demonstrated “a routine failure to adequately investigate the motive” in labor killings as well as to “bring to justice all responsible parties.”

A chief finding: The 74 convictions achieved over the past year owe largely to plea bargains with members of illegal far-right militias who confessed to killings in exchange for leniency.

They did so under the so-called Justice and Peace law that gave paramilitary fighters reduced prison sentences of up to eight years in exchange for laying down their arms and confessing to crimes. That law expired at the end of 2006, the year the free trade pact was signed.

Only in a handful of cases did prosecutors pursue evidence that the paramilitaries who confessed acted on the orders of politicians, employers or others, Human Rights Watch says.

Prosecutors “made virtually no progress in prosecuting people who order, pay, instigate or collude with paramilitaries in attacking trade unionists,” the letter states. “What is at stake is the justice system’s ability to act as an effective deterrent to anti-union violence.”

Of the more than 275 convictions handed down through May, 80 percent were against

former members of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia, or AUC. The head of international affairs in the chief prosecutor’s office, Francisco Echeverri, told the AP that it has put 513 people in prison.

In nearly half of 50 recent convictions reviewed by Human Rights Watch, the judges cited “evidence pointing to the involvement of members of the security forces or intelligence services, politicians, landowners, bosses or coworkers.” Yet in only one of those cases was such an individual convicted.

In the case of a gym teacher and union activist killed in the northwestern town of San Rafael in 2002, one of the paramilitaries who confessed to the crime said it was committed at the request of the mayor, according to the judge’s decision.

The man who was mayor at the time and was re-elected in 2008, Edgar Eladio Giraldo, is not being formally investigated and has not been questioned about the killing, said Hernando Castaneda, chief of the special unit.

“I have no knowledge of that and did not know that I was involved in that,” Giraldo told The Associated Press by telephone when asked about the killing of Julio Ernesto Ceballos.

A spokeswoman for Chief Prosecutor Morales said Sunday that her boss had not yet seen the Human Rights Watch letter.

Dan Kovalik of the United Steel Workers said the study’s findings and the continued killings “prove what labor is telling the White House: The labor rights situation in Colombia is not improving, and passage of the FTA is not appropriate.”

A memo soon to be released by the AFL-CIO deems Colombia noncompliant with the “Labor Action Plan” Santos and Obama agreed to in April as a condition for White House approval of the free trade pact.

In the memo, shown to the AP, the labor federation finds neither “economic, political, or moral justification for rewarding Colombia with a free trade agreement.”

Deputy Assistant U.S. Trade Representative Nkenge Harmon said Friday when presented with the study’s findings that Colombia’s record prosecuting “perpetrators of violence” against labor activists “has improved significantly,” though she added that Colombian officials acknowledge more needs to be done.

Harmon also stressed that additional Colombian resources are being dedicated to the issue and that the U.S. government “is working intensively with them through training and support.”

Human Rights Watch acknowledged that annual trade unionists killings are only a quarter of what they were a decade ago. And it applauded some measures taken by Chief Prosecutor Morales, including her announcement that an additional 100 police investigators would be assigned to the special investigative unit.

But HRW regional director Jose Miguel Vivanco said “the challenge (Morales) is facing remains huge.”

A U.S. congressman who has met with various Colombian presidents on human rights issues, Jim McGovern, a Democrat from Massachusetts, doesn’t think enough has been done to reverse what he called a “dismal” record.

Said McGovern: “My worry is that if you approve the FTA at this particular point you remove all the pressure off the powers that be in Colombia to actually make a sincere, honest and concerted attempt to improve the situation.”

A STATEMENT OF CONSCIENCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WOLF) for 5 minutes.

Mr. WOLF. My conscience has compelled me to come to the floor today to voice concerns I have with the influence Grover Norquist, the president of Americans for Tax Reform, has on the political process in Washington. My issue is not with ATR’s goal of keeping taxes low. Like Ronald Reagan said, and I believe, “The problem is not that the people are taxed too little; the problem is that government spends too much.”

I want to be perfectly clear: I do not support raising taxes on the American people. My concern is with the other individuals, groups and causes with whom Mr. Norquist is associated that have nothing to do with keeping taxes low.

Among them:

One, Mr. Norquist’s relationship with Jack Abramoff. Mr. Abramoff essentially laundered money through ATR and Mr. Norquist knew it.

Two, his association and representation of terrorist financier and vocal Hamas supporter Abdurahman Alamoudi. He also is associated with terrorist financier Sami al-Arian, who pled guilty in 2006 to conspiring to provide services to Palestinian Islamic jihad.

Three, Mr. Norquist’s lobbying on behalf of Fannie Mae.

Fourth, Mr. Norquist’s representation of the Internet gambling industry.

Fifth, Mr. Norquist’s advocacy of moving Guantanamo Bay detainees to the United States, including 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed.

Simply put, I believe Mr. Norquist is connected with or has profited from a number of unsavory people and groups out of the mainstream. I also believe that Mr. Norquist has used the ATR “pledge” as leverage to advance other issues that many Americans would find inappropriate and, when taken as a whole, should give people pause.

I raise these concerns today in the context of dealing with the future of our country. America is in trouble. Unemployment is over 9 percent. Housing values continue to decline. Retirement accounts are threatened. The American people are worried. Yet Washington is tragically shackled in ideological gridlock. Some are dead set against any change to entitlement programs, while others insist that any discussion of tax policy is off the table.

We are at a point today that the tsunami of debt in America demands that every piece of the budget be scrutinized, and that means more than just cutting waste, fraud and abuse and discretionary programs. The real runaway spending is occurring in our out-of-control entitlement costs and the hundreds of billions in annual tax earmarks in our Tax Code. Until we reach an agreement that addresses those two drivers of our deficit and debt, we cannot right our fiscal ship of state. Everything must be on the table, and I believe how the “pledge” is interpreted and enforced by Mr. Norquist is a roadblock to realistically reforming our Tax Code.