

Venezuela is not a crime." Liberate Leopoldo.

Sentenced along with Leopoldo as human rights activists were Cristian Holdack, Angel Gonzalez, and Demian Martin, three students whose charge sheets include public instigation, damages to property, and arson—all false charges. Their crimes were nothing more than standing up to the regime—the corrupt, illegitimate regime—of Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela and demanding a better country that would have respect for human rights, that would have freedom of the press, and that would have free and fair elections and other universally recognized rights.

As this says, demanding a better Venezuela is not a crime, except it is in Venezuela. Democracy advocates are harassed; they are abused; they are imprisoned; they are beaten; and some are even killed—yes, killed. We cannot stand idly by while democracy and due process are trampled on in our own hemisphere.

Democracies like Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, and Chile should join the U.S. in advocating for democracy and stability for Venezuela, and freedom for the many political prisoners who are languishing in Maduro's gulags. I urge the Obama administration to immediately sanction the judge, prosecutors, and those who led this politically motivated kangaroo court against Leopoldo Lopez, against these students, and against so many.

The President can use the power granted to the executive branch when we passed here in the U.S. House of Representatives and in the United States Senate the Venezuelan sanctions legislation last year. The President must act. Mr. Speaker, let's hope that he does.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to denounce so many human rights violations that are occurring throughout the hemisphere, whether it is in Venezuela or my native homeland of Cuba. As the Pope prepares for his historic trip to Cuba this weekend, he should meet with those people, like the political prisoners who share common interests of peace and justice with the Catholic Church. The church stands for liberty; it defends the freedoms of oppressed people, the freedoms to pursue one's goals and dreams without having to live in fear.

The Castro regime stands for the complete opposite. It stands for oppression, for violence, for hatred, for injustice, and I would urge His Holiness to meet with those who truly defend the values for which the church stands; people like this young man, a graffiti artist, a young man who has only known Communist Cuba as his government. His name is El Sexto. It means the sixth one, in reference to some other charges.

El Sexto has been behind bars for nearly 9 months. He has been on a hunger strike to protest the brutal Castro regime. What did he do? This is what he did. He had a picture of two farm

animals, and he put the names of Fidel and Raul on them. For that, he has been imprisoned with no contact with the outside world.

In January, another young man, a Cuban rapper named El Dkano, was sentenced to a year in prison just because he used music to criticize the Castro regime, a regime which has not unclenched its fist against the Cuban people.

Yesterday, pro-democracy leader Jorge Luis Garcia Perez, also known as Antunez, and 10 of his activists of the organization National Civic Resistance Front announced that they have begun a fast in an attempt to get a meeting with His Holiness to raise the plight of the suffering Cuban people.

These are just a few of the prisoners, Mr. Speaker, who have received harsh sentences after President Obama signed and announced this ill-fated deal with the Castro regime on December 17.

Reports indicate that the Castro regime is planning on releasing more than 3,000 prisoners in advance of the Pope's visit to Cuba, and you will think, hey, that sounds like a good idea, but let's remember this: Many of those prisoners should have never been in jail in the first place. By the way, political prisoners like El Sexto, for doing an artwork, will not be included in that number. No political prisoners will be freed, but that is not anything new, Mr. Speaker.

In 1978, Fidel Castro released almost 3,800 political prisoners ahead of Jimmy Carter's visit; in 1998, Fidel Castro released 300 prisoners ahead of Pope John Paul's visit; in the year 2011, Raul Castro released nearly 3,100 ahead of Pope Benedict's visit; yet the Castro regime has detained an unprecedented number of Cubans this year. With all of these people being freed, this year, there has been an unprecedented number of arrests in Cuba of political activists.

We can be sure that before the Pope's visit, during the Pope's visit, and after the Pope's visit, more innocent Cubans will be detained—like El Sexto—by the regime and thrown into Castro's gulags. This tactic is nothing new, and it is not indicative of a change of policy by the evil, despotic, sadistic Castro regime. It is just a political propaganda farce.

Will the Pope see this cynical move for what it is? We shall soon see, Mr. Speaker.

INVESTIGATIONS INTO PLANNED PARENTHOOD

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Tennessee (Mrs. BLACKBURN) for 5 minutes.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Speaker, I am here this morning to speak about the investigations into Planned Parenthood and to the sale of fetal tissues. We are beginning this process in our Committee on Energy and Commerce;

and we are approaching this in a thoughtful manner, beginning these investigations as we look at life rights and focus on the lives of these unborn children and the mothers who have gone through this process.

It is so interesting to me, as we have this discussion of fetal tissue sales and what all has transpired in the selling of these tissues, that we look to science. What science has shown us is that these are not blobs of tissue; these are babies.

This weekend, I had the opportunity to go to a baby shower, and a very excited grandmother showed me the sonogram, the picture of her unborn granddaughter already named and being celebrated. As we looked at it, we could distinguish these features of this child yet unborn, but this child fully formed and developing and sleeping in her mother's womb.

There was great excitement to celebrate this arrival, and we know that this is a fight worth having and a process worth ending as we look at the selling of these fetal organs and what has transpired.

Now, everyone is familiar with what happened with Kermit Gosnell in his house of horrors, and we know there was a conviction, but what we have learned is those convictions are very rare. We have moved now to the video footage that The Center for Medical Progress released, and we see that this is absolutely sickening, abhorrent.

□ 1100

These videos have raised a lot of suspicion about what has transpired in these Planned Parenthood affiliates and clinics and questions as to whether they have systematically and repeatedly broken laws.

Obtaining informed consent for fetal tissue donation, how was that approached? Killing infants born alive after an attempted induced abortion, who are the persons entitled to legal protection here?

As you look at a botched abortion and you have a child born alive, all of a sudden you have got two patients there that you are considering.

Dr. Deborah Nucatola, Senior Director of Medical Services for Planned Parenthood Federation of America, describes harvesting human tissues. In one of the videos, she talks about crushing this part or the other part of the baby in order to get a good specimen.

To listen to her callous description and her casual manner is sickening, but it also may violate some of the Federal laws which prohibit alteration of abortion procedures to obtain fetal tissue.

In another video, a technician says:

I'm sitting here and I'm looking at this fetus, and its heart is beating, and I don't know what to think. I don't know if that constitutes it's technically dead or it's alive.

Imagine that. This baby, if it had arrived in a hospital with a NICU and doctors surrounding it, there would

have been a rush to make certain that life was saved.

And God bless those NICU specialists who work with these preemie babies. We have all spent time with them and are grateful that they are there.

The cheap veneer of the left, the defense of abortion as a matter of reproductive choice, is wearing thin. Reproductive rights?

As I said, let's talk about life rights. Let's discuss life rights. It is Constitution Day, the right to life, liberty, pursuit of happiness.

We have got several bills that our Members are bringing forward, which I will submit for the RECORD, along, Mr. Speaker, with those Democrats that voted for the Born-Alive Infants Protection Act of 2002, which was passed in this House by a voice vote.

PLANNED PARENTHOOD BILLS

H.R. 3134, THE DEFUND PLANNED PARENTHOOD ACT OF 2015 (BLACK)

Bill would impose a one-year moratorium on all federal funding to Planned Parenthood or any of its affiliates while investigations are conducted unless they certify they will not perform abortions or provide funds to other entities that perform abortions.

Restriction does not apply in cases of rape, incest or woman's health concerns.

H.R. 3429, THE PROHIBITING THE LIFE-ENDING INDUSTRY OF FETAL ORGAN EXCHANGE ACT OR THE PRO-LIFE ACT (YODER)

This bill amends the Public Health Service Act to prohibit the transfer of fetal tissue in exchange for valuable consideration, including payments associated with the transportation, implantation, processing, preservation, quality control, or storage of human fetal tissue.

H.R. 3494, THE PROTECTING INFANTS BORN ALIVE ACT (BLACKBURN)

Draft legislation I have authored to strengthen and improve the Born-Alive Infants Protection Act of 2002.

The Born-Alive Infants Protection Act of 2002 became law on August 5, 2002 and requires that any reference to person, human being, child or individual include every infant born alive.

Both Ellmers and Blackburn bills will ban any provider proven of violating either of these existing laws from participating in Medicare, Medicaid, and CHIP and will allow states that suspect any violation of these existing laws to ban those suspected from the state's Medicaid program.

H.R. 3495, THE WOMEN'S PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY ACT (DUFFY)

The bill amends the Medicaid law to allow states the flexibility and discretion to be able to exclude abortion providers like Planned Parenthood from Medicaid. States that have tried to defund Planned Parenthood have been blocked by the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services assertion that states must fund Planned Parenthood under what is known as the "free choice of qualified provider" provision in Medicaid. Since the release of the undercover videos by Center for Medical Progress three states (Louisiana, Alabama and Arkansas) have sought to terminate Planned Parenthood's Medicaid contracts and are now embroiled in lawsuits.

H.R. 3504, THE BORN-ALIVE ABORTION SURVIVORS PROTECTION ACT (FRANKS)

Bill mandates that infants born alive during abortions are legal persons entitled to all the rights and protections allowed to other

legal persons, including needed medical care and attention. This legislation requires the same care for a child born alive during an abortion as a naturally premature baby born in a hospital. Any violation to this rule is a federal offense and must immediately be reported to law enforcement.

The bill also provides for criminal penalties for providers who fail to provide care to baby.

H.R. XX, THE PROTECT INFANTS FROM PARTIAL-BIRTH ABORTION ACT (ELLMERS)

Legislation will bolster the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003.

The Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003 amends the Federal Criminal code to ban partial-birth abortions except in the interest of the life of the mother

H.R. 3515, SMITH DISMEMBERMENT ABORTION BAN ACT

The Born Alive Infants Protection Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-207) passed the House by voice vote and the Senate by UC. The following is a list of Democrats who were serving when these votes took place.

DEMOCRATIC SENATORS

Tammy Baldwin*, Barbara Boxer, Sherrod Brown*, Benjamin L. Cardin*, Maria Cantwell, Tom Carper, Dick Durbin, Dianne Feinstein, Patrick Leahy, Edward J. Markey*, Robert Menendez*, Barbara Mikulski, Patty Murray, Bill Nelson (FL), Jack Reed, Harry Reid, Chuck Schumer, Debbie Stabenow, Tom Udall (NM)*, Ron Wyden.

*Served in the House during the 107th Congress.

DEMOCRATIC HOUSE MEMBERS

Xavier Becerra, Sanford D. Bishop Jr., Earl Blumenauer, Robert A. Brady, Corrine Brown, Lois Capps, Michael E. Capuano, James E. Clyburn, John Conyers Jr., Joseph Crowley, Elijah E. Cummings, Danny K. Davis, Susan A. Davis, Peter A. DeFazio, Diana DeGette, Rosa L. DeLauro, Lloyd Doggett, Michael F. Doyle, Eliot L. Engel, Anna G. Eshoo.

Sam Farr, Chaka Fattah, Gene Green, Luis V. Gutiérrez, Alcee L. Hastings, Rubén Hinojosa, Michael M. Honda, Steny H. Hoyer, Steve Israel, Sheila Jackson-Lee, Eddie Bernice Johnson, Marcy Kaptur, Ron Kind, James R. Langevin, Rick Larsen, Barbara Lee, Sander M. Levin, John Lewis, Nita M. Lowey, Stephen F. Lynch.

Betty McCollum, Jim McDermott, James P. McGovern, Carolyn B. Maloney, Gregory W. Meeks, Jerrold Nadler, Grace F. Napolitano, Richard E. Neal, Eleanor Holmes Norton, Frank Pallone Jr., Bill Pascrell Jr., Donald M. Payne, Nancy Pelosi, Collin C. Peterson, David E. Price, Charles B. Rangel, Lucille Roybal-Allard, Bobby L. Rush, Loretta Sanchez, Janice D. Schakowsky.

Adam B. Schiff, Robert C. Scott, José E. Serrano, Brad Sherman, Louise McIntosh Slaughter, Adam Smith, Bennie G. Thompson, Mike Thompson, Nydia M. Velázquez, Peter J. Visclosky, Maxine Waters.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until noon today.

Accordingly (at 11 o'clock and 2 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1200

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker at noon.

PRAYER

Reverend Brondon Reems, Center of Hope Community Church, Oakland, California, offered the following prayer:

O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the Earth. We honor You. We beseech thee in behalf of these, our United States and Congress.

Heavenly Father, we depend on You for skillful and Godly wisdom, to enter into the hearts and minds of those in authority. Only You know the rightness of their cause, their purpose, and their plans.

To thee, do they now look up, realizing that their help comes from You. They look to You for Your approval and for Your support. They look to You for favor that only You can give.

We thank You, Heavenly Father, for Your mercy as we seek peace in all of these United States and the world. We give thanks for the leaders You have given to us. We thank You for Your love and protection that surrounds them.

We ask that You continue to bless, strengthen, and preserve those they represent. We believe in Your Word that declares blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.

Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER. Will the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. GARRETT) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. GARRETT led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

WELCOMING REVEREND BRONDON REEMS

The SPEAKER. Without objection, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE) is recognized for 1 minute.

There was no objection.

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, I am so pleased to welcome Pastor Brondon Reems to the House floor this morning after delivering such a powerful prayer.

Pastor Reems is the senior pastor of the Center of Hope Community Church in Oakland, California, a church founded by his mother—a great woman of faith, who has broken so many glass ceilings for women, especially for African American women—Bishop Ernestine Reems.

His wife, Pastor Maria, who is also here with us today, is his partner in