

FREE OSCAR LOPEZ RIVERA

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

Mr. GUTIÉRREZ. Mr. Speaker, this past weekend, I visited four cities in four States to meet with Puerto Rican elected officials, leaders, and members of the Puerto Rican diaspora about a very important campaign.

I was in Hartford, Connecticut; Springfield and Holyoke, Massachusetts; New York, New York; and Newark, New Jersey, for activities, parades, and discussions that were very successful. This week, I will be back in Chicago with my fellow Puerto Ricans at the National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture to honor the organization and to recognize the talent and cultural contributions of Antonio Martorell and Lin-Manuel Miranda, who make us all proud.

But I am not traveling on a campaign for President or for a political candidate. Rather, I am meeting with people all over about a campaign for the current President to take action before he leaves office in January to free Oscar Lopez Rivera, the last political prisoner from Puerto Rico, who has been held for 35 years in an American prison.

No one disputes that the President of the United States has the power to grant pardons, commute sentences, and grant clemency. It is a power the President alone possesses as our chief executive. Congress and the courts can do nothing to override him in this case.

Puerto Ricans and allies all over the world are asking the President to grant clemency to Oscar Lopez Rivera. He was not convicted of committing a violent crime. Rather, he was convicted of seditious conspiracy, espousing the belief that the people of Puerto Rico are capable of, entitled to, and have the right to self-determination and freedom.

This man, Oscar Lopez Rivera, who is now in his seventies and has spent half of his life in prison, is no threat to the United States or Puerto Rico. He harbors no nefarious plot to harm anyone. He is simply a man who served an inordinate sentence for the crime for which he was convicted. And now Puerto Ricans want their elder statesman to live out his days in Puerto Rico. In fact, Mr. Speaker, there are few issues that unite the Puerto Rican people more than the united front that is assembling to call for the release of Oscar Lopez Rivera.

Hundreds have already pledged to join us on October 9 in Lafayette Park in Washington, D.C., to make our unity and our commitment known. I know from my own experience that all too often Puerto Ricans are divided from each other along so many lines of politics, class, and geography. But in this case, in this cause, in the united call, Puerto Ricans are united as never before.

The House and the Senate of the island's legislature, all the candidates

for Governor and major office, current and past elected officials, city councils and municipal governments across the island, from San Juan to the smallest villages, support the release of Oscar Lopez Rivera—across party lines, across lines that often separate statehood advocates and independence and commonwealth advocates. Practically every bishop, every denomination, every congregation, parish, and church—almost the entire faith community on the island—has called for Oscar's release.

It is not just a Puerto Rican thing, Mr. Speaker. It is a movement that has sparked followers across the United States as well. The AFL-CIO, AFSCME, SEIU, Communications Workers of America, and other allies in the labor movement are standing up for justice and standing up for the release of Oscar Lopez Rivera.

The ACLU, the Hispanic National Bar Association, and religious leaders of all stripes are onboard. The City Council of New York City and the Newark, New Jersey Municipal Council passed resolutions. My friends and colleagues on the Congressional Hispanic Caucus here in Congress have joined us in the call for Oscar Lopez Rivera to be released. I thank the members of the Hispanic Caucus.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Oscar Lopez Rivera's case and the call for him to be released has received international attention and validation. Presidents, Nobel laureates, leaders, artists, activists, and the world over, know it is time to let Oscar return in peace to his island.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the Archbishop Emeritus of the Anglican Church in Cape Town, a true champion of justice across the globe, has expressed his unwavering support for the release of this prisoner.

Mr. Speaker, based on the merits of this case, the outpouring of support, and the moral obligation and power that has been placed in his hands, I join freedom fighters, justice lovers, Puerto Ricans, and individuals across the globe in asking President Obama to use his pen to free Oscar Lopez Rivera.

Please join us in Washington, D.C., on October 9 in Lafayette Park and let your voice be heard.

COMMEMORATING THE NICKLAUS CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL SCHOOL LIAISON PROGRAM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) for 5 minutes.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the efforts of my former staff member, Janelle Perez, and her partner, Monica Ruiz, in helping the School Liaison Program for Nicklaus Children's Hospital, located in my congressional district.

Having both been affected by cancer in different life-altering ways, Janelle and Monica collaborated with the

Miami Children's Health Foundation on methods that could have the largest and most profound impact on the lives of so many children who are undergoing treatment at the Nicklaus Children's Hospital.

Through Janelle and Monica's passion for children and education, the School Liaison Program was born. The program is designed to provide guidance and advocacy to patients and their families in order to continue academic growth while undergoing clinical treatment.

The program aids in recovery by bringing a sense of normalcy and confidence to these children, instilling in them the hope that they will recover and soon return to the normal day-to-day activities they enjoyed before becoming ill.

Congratulations to Janelle and Monica for helping sick children through the Nicklaus Children's Hospital School Liaison Program.

COMMEMORATING THE MIAMI CHILDRENS THEATER ON ITS 20TH ANNIVERSARY

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the Miami Children's Theater on its 20th anniversary as an invaluable education center for children and young adults in our south Florida community. I would like to recognize its outstanding leadership team, including their executive producing director and founder, Angela Ardolino.

Originally an after-school program at the Coral Gables Youth Center, located in my congressional district, it was Angela's efforts and strategic vision that transformed this prominent center into what it is today.

Miami Children's Theater was the first children's theater in the Nation to be granted rights to the student edition of *Les Misérables*.

More importantly, children and young adults from all over the community are given the opportunity to explore the arts and expand on their creativity both on stage and in classes.

It is my honor and privilege to recognize the Miami Children's Theater and wish all of the members the best as they work toward the next 20 years of service to our south Florida community.

HONORING THE EPILEPSY FOUNDATION OF FLORIDA

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of the Epilepsy Foundation of Florida as it celebrates its 45th anniversary.

From support groups to case management and medical services, the Epilepsy Foundation offers diverse programs and resources and serves as a pillar of support to the over 400,000 Floridians living with this condition.

Mr. Speaker, this neurological disorder is in need of greater public attention. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, people with epilepsy experience health and social disparities, such as a worse health-related quality of life and low socioeconomic status.