

Again, Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate Vickie Jasmann for winning the 2018 Wyoming Jefferson Award and thank her for her countless contributions to her community. She deserves to be extremely proud of all her hard work and of this award.

HONORING THE LIFE AND LEGACY
OF FIRST LADY BARBARA
PIERCE BUSH

SPEECH OF

HON. MARC A. VEASEY

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 25, 2018

Mr. VEASEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the life of First Lady Barbara Pierce Bush.

As our nation mourns the loss of a true patriot, an advocate for families, a treasured First Lady, a dedicated wife, mother and grandmother, we also take the time to remember the legacy Barbara Bush left behind.

Barbara Bush was born in New York City in 1925 to Pauline and Marvin Pierce.

She went on to marry her beloved husband, George H.W. Bush in 1945. The two recently celebrated their 73rd wedding anniversary early this year. Mrs. Bush devotedly stood by her husband's side though his military service and later supported him as he entered public service and ascended the presidency.

As First Lady, moved to action by her own experience as a mother to a child with dyslexia, she used her influence to highlight the importance of family literacy. She championed this cause across our nation, helping to raise over \$110 million to support family literacy programs through the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy.

Dedicated to her mission to end the generational cycle of illiteracy, she advocated for the passage of the National Literacy Act of 1991, which established the National Institute for Literacy and allowed libraries to serve as educational literacy center for adults.

Among her big achievements was to set an example of humility and hard work for her family.

In her own words, Mrs. Bush wrote, "I want to be known as a wife, a mother, a grandmother . . . that's what I am. And I'd like to be known as someone who really cared about people . . ."

Our nation grieves with President George H.W. Bush and the entire Bush family. Our hearts are heavy, but we are grateful that we were privileged enough to bear witness to her message of grace, civility, and patriotism. She was a true gift to our nation.

I honor the incredible life and legacy of First Lady Barbara Bush.

H. RES. 861

HON. BRAD SHERMAN

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 1, 2018

Mr. SHERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I have cosponsored H. Res. 861, urging the complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization of North Korea. This does not mean that I would

necessarily oppose an accord with North Korea that only partially achieves our objectives.

THE LONG ARM OF INJUSTICE:
DID A U.N. COMMISSION FOUND-
ED TO FIGHT CORRUPTION HELP
THE KREMLIN DESTROY A RUS-
SIAN FAMILY?

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 1, 2018

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, on Friday, April 27 I chaired a hearing at the Helsinki Commission inquiring into whether a U.N. Commission founded to fight corruption worked with the Kremlin to destroy a Russian family. The Russian government regularly pursues its vendettas beyond its borders, harassing and even murdering Russian emigres abroad—people who are on the Putin circle's target list for various reasons. The poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in England is one of the most recent examples to reach the news.

The family in question is the Bitkovs, and the Kremlin's sadistic pursuit of them is in its way just as shocking as its cruel murder of Litvinenko and the attempted murders of the Skripals. The Bitkovs are still alive today, but they have been hounded for over a decade, to the opposite end of the world, and beyond the limits of human endurance—merely for resisting Putin favorites who sought to take over their successful paper manufacturing company.

More shocking, the facts of the case strongly indicate—and we will hear testimony on this today—that the United Nation's International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala, or CICIG, became deeply involved in the Kremlin's persecution of the Bitkov family. Indeed that CICIG acted as the Kremlin's operational agent in brutalizing and tormenting the Bitkov family.

Congress has a special responsibility in this matter because the United States is one of the largest contributors to CICIG's budget. There has been little congressional oversight of CICIG—it's clearly time for that to change.

In the 1990s Igor and Irina Bitkov built the Northwest Timber Company, acquiring and modernizing old factories to increase paper production. As their company grew, the Bitkovs took loans from several Russian state banks to finance further modernization. Their business prospered—grew to a value of hundreds of millions of dollars—and the family was approached by a powerful bank executive who sought to buy a majority share in the company at a significantly below-market rate. Other officials asked Irina to become politically involved in the President Vladimir Putin's party.

When the Bitkovs refused things got very ugly. Their 16-year-old daughter, Anastasia, was kidnapped for several days, drugged, and repeatedly raped. Her parents ransomed her—paying the money to policemen, who said they were go-betweens to the kidnappers. Then the banks suddenly called in the loans, even though the Bitkovs had excellent credit. The family was threatened with imprisonment and death.

Fearing for their lives, the family fled Russia. They found what they thought was legal refuge in Guatemala with the help of a Guatemalan law firm. They acquired Guatemalan passports, bought a house, learned Spanish, and gave birth to their second child, Vladimir.

But the Kremlin caught up to them and VTB Bank, one of Russia's biggest state-controlled banks, often referred to as "Putin's Piggy Bank," filed a complaint against them in Guatemala, alleging use of false identification documents.

While we don't know exactly what transpired internally to CICIG and the Guatemalan state agencies that work with them, it appears to have been taken up by the Guatemalan state and CICIG. In any case, the Bitkov's suddenly found themselves catapulted into what has become for them a horror without end.

On January 15, 2015, Igor, Irina, Anastasia and Vladimir were awoken by an armed raid on their home—70 or so armed policemen woke them up, took them away, and spent 20 hours tearing apart their home and their office.

It got much worse—the Bitkovs were put into cages for nine days. Their daughter—remember she had been kidnapped and repeatedly raped years earlier—was denied medication, now suffered a nervous breakdown. As the ordeal continued, she would later make multiple suicide attempts. Their infant son was torn away from them, not even permitted to stay with friends, and sent to an orphanage, where he sustained facial injuries, a chipped tooth, conjunctivitis, lost the ability to speak. When family friends recovered him they found that, when given food, little Vladimir immediately began hiding it under his shirt. I will not say more now about the Bitkovs harrowing ordeal—their lawyers will speak to that. Suffice it to say that Igor, Irina, and Anastasia have remained incarcerated since January 2015.

In January of this year, despite an earlier appeals court ruling that the Bitkovs' alleged offense was only administrative in nature and punishable with a fine, Igor was sentenced to 19 years in prison and Irina and Anastasia were sentenced to 14 years each. These sentences were far harsher than those given to Guatemalan officials who perpetrated the sale of passports—they are harsher than sentences given to rapists or murderers.

What was CICIG's role in all of this? What we know for a fact is this: CICIG and a special branch of the attorney general's office worked together on the investigation and arrest of the Bitkovs—CICIG personnel participated in the raid on the Bitkovs home. Then CICIG and VTB Bank initiated and aggressively pursued the legal case against them, consistently arguing at every level of the judicial process against the Bitkovs, including against their appeal to be tried as migrants guilty of an administrative offense rather than a criminal one. CICIG—via its representative Claudia Gonzalez Orellana—defended the role of the VTB Bank in the prosecution of the Bitkovs. Oddly, CICIG never prosecuted the law firm which provided the Bitkovs with the passports that destroyed their lives.

As Bill Browder testified: "Inexplicably . . . In January 2015, a criminal case against the Bitkovs was opened at the direction of CICIG. Immediately after, 70 armed police officers raided the Bitkov's home, arrested Irina, Igor, and Anastasia and detained them in cages behind the parking garage in the main court building of Guatemala City."