

the coast of South Florida today, June 29, between Cuban rafters seeking asylum and U.S. Coast Guard officials, and I would like to place this letter in the RECORD.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, DC, June 29, 1999.

Hon. MADELEINE ALBRIGHT,
Secretary, Department of State,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SECRETARY ALBRIGHT: I am writing on a matter of grave concern and to enlist your cooperation for an immediate investigation of the events which unfolded off the coast of Florida, today, June 29th between Cuban rafters seeking asylum and U.S. Coast Guard officials.

According to the video footage by news sources in Miami, six Cuban refugees reached U.S. territorial waters in the early afternoon and were subsequently approached by U.S. Coast Guard boats which opened water cannons on the rafters, causing some of them to fall overboard. As the rafters started to swim to safety, the smaller Coast Guard vessels pursued them and pushed them against the sand. It is reported that only after the Coast Guard had completed its attack on these defenseless freedom seekers, did they proceed to take them into custody.

These actions merit an immediate and comprehensive investigation. If confirmed, I ask that action be taken regarding these Coast Guard officials who gave the orders which violated the basic human rights of these Cuban refugees and appears to have violated U.S. guidelines on how to deal with such situations.

Your personal attention to this matter is greatly appreciated to ensure due diligence in the investigation and resolution of this case.

Sincerely,

ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN,
Member of Congress.

LET US CONTINUE TO BE A NATION THAT BELIEVES IN GOD

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. ISAKSON). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, this time is given to many of us to express our concerns and our views on the day's activities and legislative initiatives or particular issues that impact our district.

I thought I would comment today on the actions of the House that just occurred on H. Con. Res. 94. It was a vigorous debate, and I think in the true spirit of our Founding Fathers we can be very proud of that. Obviously, those who proposed an amendment, a resolution, that would cause or ask the people of this Nation to, under God, to humble and reconcile themselves with God and with one another have a true commitment and passion.

Further, as the resolution goes on, they urge all Americans to unite in seeking the face of God through humble prayer.

I believe in the Old and New Testaments. In fact, a favorite verse of mine is John 3:16, for God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever shall believe in Him shall not perish but shall have everlasting life.

In the Christian faith, that son is called Jesus; and for those of us who believe, we believe within our heart, it is a conversion, it is a commitment and passion about our personal and religious beliefs.

Even as I stand here, I think many of us can note that above my head are the words, In God We Trust, but we might not be able to see some additional words that are behind me on this wooden border. It says, justice and tolerance.

I would not want the world or the Nation to believe that the defeat of H. Con. Res. 94 had anything to do with the personal beliefs of the Members of the United States Congress. It had more to do with our understanding of our constitutional underpinnings, the premise of the separation of church and State.

No, it does not mean that wherever I go I cannot utter a personal prayer to whoever I believe in. It may be Allah, it may be Jesus or God or some other name, Jehovah, that I am not familiar with. I do not stop anyone from doing that. Frankly, as a mother, I tell my children whenever they are in time of stress, offer a word of prayer; my belief, my teachings that I have taught my family.

For us to go and solicit on the floor of the House, urging all Americans to unite in seeking the face of God through humble prayer is not respecting and not tolerating those who are different from us. This Nation was founded on the grounds that there are those who are escaping religious persecution.

I would hesitate and would not like for the vote today to be cast about by those who want to spin it and say that we defeated an opportunity for reconciliation, an opportunity for prayer. I hope this Nation will pray in whichever way it chooses, as it is a diverse and religiously diverse community. In fact, I hope the clergy of this land heard the debate and maybe independent of government will rise up and call for a day of prayer where all of them will come to the United States Capitol, their capitol, their place, where they can come, it is free for anyone to come, and acknowledge whichever god they so desire.

I hope whatever day of worship one has that they will kneel, however they pray, and ask for this Nation to be healed and unified.

H. Con. Res. 94 had no place for the United States Congress to demand and call upon this Nation to pray in any certain way or humble themselves in any certain way.

So I hope that we can see the vote as a positive; that we remain on the day or the eve of July 4, Independence Day, when this fledgling Nation became a unified country, pledging allegiance to the flag of the United States, under God, acknowledging that but also a Nation that believed in the Bill of Rights, that no matter where one came from, no matter who their God was, they had

the right to be an American and they had the right to the privileges of that wonderful equality, to be able to pray as they so desired.

I hope that we will be able to do actions, as one of my colleagues did say.

As I close, Mr. Speaker, I hope we will pass the hate crimes bill. I hope we will support Head Start and education. There are many things we can do to show ourselves compassionate. I hope that we will find a way to end school violence and gun violence. I hope that we will come together to work on these solutions, no matter what religious background we have, for the betterment of this Nation.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that we continue to be a Nation that believes.

THE SURPLUS, NATIONAL FORESTS, THE METRIC SYSTEM, AND THE DEFEAT OF THE NATIONAL DAYS OF PRAYER

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

Mr. DUNCAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight to briefly mention three unrelated topics of national importance.

First, the headlines this morning say that we will now have a surplus that is \$1 trillion larger than we thought it was going to be over the next 15 years. This is the direct result of the Congress changing hands after the 1994 elections and becoming much more fiscally conservative. We should all be pleased about this.

I remember in late 1993 or early 1994 when Alice Rivlin, who was then the President's director of the Office of Management and Budget, put out a shocking memo. She predicted then that we would have deficits, yearly losses, of over \$1 trillion by the year 2010, and between \$4 trillion and \$5 trillion a year by 2030 if major changes were not made.

If we had allowed that to happen, our economy would have been devastated. Our children, who would have then been in the primes of their lives by 2030, would not have been able to buy homes or cars or almost anything else, as is the case today in many countries around the world. So we have made remarkable fiscal progress over the last 4 or 5 years.

A word of caution is necessary. We are still almost \$6 trillion in debt. This still leaves us on very thin ice economically, but making good progress. Yet from what everyone up here is saying, people are starting to promise everything to everybody.

I simply rise tonight to say that I hope we will not spend this money before we get it. The best economists in the world cannot tell us with absolute certainty where the stock market and the economy will be 1 or 2 years from now. Yet, we are already gleefully celebrating and making major spending plans based on money we hope to get 15 years from now. We will get it if we remain fiscally conservative, but I say

again, very simply, let us not spend it before we get it. If we do, we will do much more harm than good.

Secondly, at a hearing of the Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health this afternoon, it was brought out once again that we are now growing about 23 billion board feet of new trees and timber each year in our national forests. Yet we are allowing only 3 billion board feet, or only one-seventh of the new growth, to be cut.

There is about 6 billion board feet of dead or dying trees and timber in the national forests. In other words, we are allowing trees to be cut at only half the number that are dead or dying.

In addition, it was brought out that there are 500 million acres of forest land in the United States which are not in the national forests. This is an amount of land equal to about 900 Great Smoky Mountain National Parks. People look at a map of this country on one small page in a book and they simply do not realize how big this Nation is. Yet there are environmental extremists who just do not want us to cut any trees.

If we are going to have healthy forests, we have to cut some trees. If we are going to have reasonably priced homes, books, toilet paper, newspapers, magazines, we have to cut some trees. And as shocking as it may be to some who have heard only one side of propaganda from these environmental extremists, when we are growing 23 billion board feet each year in our national forests and cutting only 3 billion. We should cut much more so that our forests can be healthier and so that prices can be lower on almost everything.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to read on the front page of yesterday's Washington Times that many States are now moving away from the metric system. I am pleased that we gave the States some flexibility on this in last year's highway bill. This was something the Federal Government and a few powerful liberal elitists tried to force on us, but the American people never accepted the metric system. Unfortunately, this has cost our government at all levels and business many billions of dollars.

There was never a good reason to go to the metric system in this country. We have made this very expensive effort only because it would be helpful to a few large multinational corporations and because some people unfortunately think that anything that is done in most of the rest of the world should automatically be done here.

Yet for most of this Nation's history, Americans were not afraid to be a little bit different, a little bit unique, a little bit special. I hope the Federal Government and all the State governments will be responsive to our own citizens for once and end this expensive and elitist effort to force an unnecessary metric system down on us.

Let me add, Mr. Speaker, one other thing, just because of the vote, the defeat, we had on this national day of

prayer bill that we just had in this body. William Raspberry, the great columnist for The Washington Post, wrote several years ago, he said, is it not just possible that anti-religious bias masquerading as religious neutrality has cost this Nation far more than we have been willing to acknowledge?

A very good statement by William Raspberry, a very good question for all Americans to ask: Is it not just possible that anti-religious bias masquerading as religious neutrality has cost us far more than we have been willing to acknowledge?

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS FOR SENIORS

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

Mr. GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, seniors are being forced to choose between buying food and their prescribed medications.

The high cost of prescription drugs is particularly difficult for seniors, who use one-third of all prescriptions. Medicare does not cover prescription drugs. So, many seniors, 37 percent, do not have prescription drug coverage and must incur these expenditures out of their own pocket.

Studies conducted by the Committee on Government Reform minority staff show that older Americans pay much higher costs than other groups. These studies show that in congressional districts across the Nation, seniors pay for prescription drugs, on average, nearly twice as much as the drug companies' favored customers, such as the Federal Government and large HMOs who have the economies of scale who can purchase it in large quantities.

So seniors are paying double what the Federal Government may be paying through the VA or through some other program.

This price differential is approximately five times greater than the average price differential for other consumer goods. So it is actually five times more than what the economies of scale and other consumer goods may cost for large purchasers.

H.R. 664, the Prescription Drug Fairness for Seniors Act, allows pharmacies to purchase drugs for Medicare beneficiaries at the best price charged to the Federal Government through programs such as the VA or Medicaid. The legislation has been estimated to reduce prescription drug prices for seniors by more than 40 percent.

That is not price controls, Mr. Speaker. H.R. 664 just ends discrimination and allows seniors to buy just like a large customer would do, seniors on Medicare, fee for service.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a bunch of Democrats trying to play politics with this issue. What we are trying to do is bring up an issue that affects all Americans, because many seniors have no prescription drug benefits. It affects

people in my district like Ms. Holec of Houston, Texas. Ms. Holec is 85-years-old and relies on Social Security as her primary source of income. She also has a medical condition that requires her to buy prescription drugs that cost \$260 every month. Ms. Holec already has had to sell her car and some of her furniture to pay for her prescription drugs.

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What is she supposed to do when she runs out of things to sell and can no longer afford her medicine that costs her now \$3,000 a year? What if she develops another condition or requires another prescription drug? The solution to the problem is the Medicare prescription benefit, one that recognizes today's health needs of senior citizens.

Today the President announced his Medicare modernization proposal. I expect many people will talk about or speak out against this proposal, but before they do, think of my constituent and maybe another constituent, someone like Mrs. Holec, who is forced to spend a significant portion of her income on prescription medication or prescription drugs.

The President's plan will establish a new voluntary Medicare part D prescription drug benefit that is both affordable and available to all beneficiaries in fee-for-service.

The Medicare task force that was made up of House Members, Senators, and public members failed for primarily two reasons: One, it forced low-income seniors into managed care, and it did not include a prescription drug benefit.

Mr. Speaker, seniors should not have to look to managed care for their health needs. They should be able to look to Medicare. Whether it is the Prescription Drug Fairness Act that I am a cosponsor of, or the proposal outlined by the President today, or maybe another proposal that some Members would come up with, we have the responsibility to provide for this critical benefit.

Simply relying on managed care to meet this need is both unrealistic and unfair to beneficiaries. HMO coverage of prescription drugs varies widely between plans, and often has caps that do not fit the needs of the beneficiaries. Moreover, some beneficiaries do not have an HMO choice because they live in rural areas, Mr. Speaker.

I hope my Republican colleagues are as committed to solving this problem as the President is and my Democratic colleagues. If so, maybe they can join us in support of either one of these proposal or develop a new proposal, just so we can make sure that seniors have prescription medication without having to literally put themselves into poverty to do so.

However, to continue to do nothing it seems, like we do with so many issues important to hard-working Americans, is not the option. So I hope many Members will look at not only what the