

November 19, 2014

**ON THE DEDICATION OF A BUST OF VÁCLAV HAVEL IN THE UNITED STATES CAPITOL**

Mr. HOYER. “Today, Democrats and Republicans from both the House and Senate came together to dedicate a bust of former Czech President Václav Havel that will be displayed prominently in the U.S. Capitol building.

“President Havel was both a playwright and a freedom fighter. His literary works artfully undermined the totalitarian Communist system under which Czechs languished from 1948-1989, and he co-founded the Charter 77 Movement that called out the Communist regime for human rights violations as well as the Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Prosecuted, which supported dissidents. He was among the leaders of the Velvet Revolution twenty-five years ago this month, which ended Communist rule and finally opened the door to democracy and freedom of expression.

“To his credit, President Havel navigated the difficult process of fostering a democratic political culture in the Czech Republic’s new institutions of government while instilling hope for the future in a people whose yearnings and optimism had been suppressed for a generation. In office, he oversaw the first free and fair elections in over four decades and worked to build friendly ties with nations that had been shunned by the Communist bloc. When he retired in 2003, the Czech Republic had developed a vibrant democracy, had joined NATO, and was on the cusp of entering the European Union.

“Václav Havel died in 2011, but his legacy continues to inspire freedom fighters and democratic activists throughout the world. In an op-ed in the *Washington Post* earlier this week, Carl Gershman, President of the National Endowment for Democracy, wrote about Havel’s affection for the United States and the values it embodies: ‘When he addressed a joint session of Congress just three months after the revolution, Havel spoke

with deep feeling about his country's indebtedness to the United States, including for President Woodrow Wilson's great support for the founding of Czechoslovakia in 1918, U.S. sacrifice and leadership in three wars – two hot and one cold – to save freedom in Europe, and the American founding documents that “inspire us to be citizens.” President Havel's advocacy on behalf of dissidents and freedom fighters around the world created a forceful, universalist legacy.

“President Havel once wrote: ‘The real test of a man is not how well he plays the role he has invented for himself, but how well he plays the role that destiny has assigned to him.’ Václav Havel passed that test, in sharp contrast to another leader who today is failing it miserably.

“Russian President Vladimir Putin came into office in 2000 with an opportunity and an obligation to help the people of his nation transition from the ills of Soviet Communism and foreign aggression to real democracy and peaceful coexistence with other nations. Sadly, over the past fourteen years he has sabotaged Russia's democratic transition by suppressing dissent, fostering a cult of personality, and pursuing violent and aggressive actions against Russia's neighbors.

“This has been on full display over the past year in Ukraine, where one year ago courageous protesters gathered in Kiev's Maidan Square to reject Putin's attempts to pull their country closer into Russia's orbit and away from greater democracy and economic opportunity. The Maidan protests and the regime's violent response to them ushered in a new beginning for Ukrainian democracy, with free and fair elections held earlier this year. Unwilling to accept the decision the Ukrainian people have made about the future they want for their own nation, Putin's Russia has violated Ukraine's sovereignty by illegally annexing Crimea as well as sending troops and equipment across the border into southeastern Ukraine, much as it has done in the nation of Georgia.

“Vladimir Putin could have used his leadership of Russia to meet the challenge history presented to him and his nation after the fall of Communism. Instead, he seeks to reverse the course of history through his desire to

re-create an autocratic and expansionist Russian empire. Putin might have played the role destiny assigned him, but instead he crafted a character that will surely be remembered as one of the chief antagonists of our age – not only for the democratic world but for the Russian people who yearn to be part of it.

“The world needs more leaders, philosophers, activists, and humble agents of positive change like Václav Havel, and not those like Vladimir Putin who subvert democracy and upend regional peace and security. I hope my colleagues will join me in paying tribute to President Havel and remembering his extraordinary contributions to his nation, to Europe, and to the world.”