Victims of Communism Memorial Fundraising Goal Met

Ground-breaking Planned for September 2006

The Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation announced on July 19, 2006 that it has met its fundraising goal of $825,000 and expects to break ground for its Memorial to the more than 100 million victims of communism in September.

"This is an all-important milestone in the history of the Foundation," said VCOMF Chairman Lee Edwards, "made possible by the generous support of an extraordinary coalition of patriotic individuals and ethnic communities, foundations and corporations, foreign governments and even political parties. Our memorial is truly an international memorial."

Baltic-American communities of Latvians, Estonians, and Lithuanians were singled out by Edwards as leading the drive to support the memorial among the ethnic communities in the United States, along with the Vietnamese-, Polish-, and Hungarian-American communities.

In 2006 alone, funding from major Baltic organizations - the World Federation of Free Latvians, the Lithuanian National Foundation (Tautos Fondas), Estonian American National Council, Daugavas Vanagi, Daugavas Vanadzes, American Latvian Association, Lithuanian American Council, and Lithuanian American Community - totals $22,000. In addition, contributions from various Baltic-American individuals have surpassed $10,000 this year. The Cleveland Baltic-American community has been especially supportive. The governments of Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia have led the way among European countries, contributing nearly $11,000 to the cause. All in all, it can be said that during the past year, Baltic support (both in the U.S. and abroad) for the construction of the memorial has surpassed $50,000.
Chairman’s Corner by Peteris Blumbergs

JBANC’s 45th year of service and representation to Baltic-Americans promises to be as active and exciting as any. On June 2 (See JBANC Celebrates its 45th on page 4), we raised a glass to toast JBANC’s past accomplishments, but it will be just as important to look forward to new projects in the upcoming year.

2006 will observe several milestones for Balts, not the least of which is the first NATO Summit to be hosted by a Baltic country, the November 2006 Summit in Riga, Latvia. This event will allow the Baltic countries to stand in the world’s spotlight and demonstrate the progress that has been made since the end of communism.

The Summit will surely create exposure for the Baltic countries as world leaders learn to appreciate this part of the world. Encouraging and facilitating visits to the Baltic Countries by American politicians and government representatives has always been an ongoing JBANC priority. Recent high-level visits have been noteworthy.

We are pleased that Vice President Cheney traveled to Lithuania in May, and that he chose to offer stark assessments and an unwavering critique of Russia policies from a Baltic pulpit.

We actively encouraged President Bush to make a visit to Estonia on his way to the G-8 Summit in St. Petersburg this July – no American President has set foot in Estonia and this is an omission that must be corrected.

Even as we seek to ensure that Americans visit and appreciate the Baltics, we must be mindful that the freedom to travel is a privilege; one that should be enjoyed by the citizens of the Baltic countries.

Citizens of most EU and NATO countries can take advantage of visa-free travel to the United States, but the Balts cannot.

JBANC has recently been involved with efforts to have legislation passed which grants visa-free travel rights to Baltic citizens. A discriminatory visa policy towards the citizens of the Baltics cannot be tolerated.

On other fronts, 2006 will be a busy year for JBANC as it prepares for its seventh Conference, which will take place in early 2007. Themes and panels are being developed and speakers are being identified. Stay tuned for more news on that in future Chronicles.
The citizens of twenty-two European countries enjoy visa-free travel privileges to the United States. Notable exceptions to this policy are the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), and Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. All seven are members of both NATO and the EU. Recently, Congress took action to redress this discriminatory policy towards Eastern Europeans, but they haven't gone far enough. **We need your help to make sure Congress takes the necessary steps to end discriminatory visa policies towards the citizens of these countries, including the Baltics.**

**Legislative Background**

On May 17, the U.S. Senate approved an amendment to the Immigration Reform Act (S. 2611) to include Poland in the Visa Waiver Program for at least two years. The amendment does not apply to the Baltic countries or to other new European Union members.

Senate amendment (SA 4000), supported by Senators Santorum, Mikulski, and Frist, states that EU countries providing military (300 or more troops) and other support to U.S. military efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan would qualify for the U.S. Visa Waiver Program. With this language, Poland would qualify, but not the Baltic countries, Hungary, the Czech Republic or Slovakia. This disparages the commitment and sacrifice of these other countries to Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan.

The House of Representatives has already adopted its own version of the immigration bill (H.R. 4437), which does not include a visa waiver provision for Poland or any other country. A vote on the final version of the Senate bill took place on May 25. A House-Senate Conference Committee will now have to reconcile the two bills (see list of possible conferees below).

While SA 4000 is a welcome step in the right direction, it would be appropriate to have not only Poland, but also the Baltic countries, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia included in the Visa Waiver Program. **This is a window of opportunity to have these countries included.**

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**Possible Conferees from Judiciary subcommittees with oversight of the legislation:**

**Senate:** Republicans Cornyn, Grassley, Kyl, DeWine, Sessions, Brownback, Coburn; Democrats Kennedy, Biden, Feinstein, Feingold, Schumer, Durbin

**House:** Republicans Hostettler, Steve King, Gohmert, Lamar Smith, Gallegly, Goodlatte, Lungren, Flake, Inglis, Issa; Democrats Jackson Lee, Berman, LoBeggio, Linda Sanchez, Waters, Meehan
A crowd of almost a hundred guests gathered on June 2, 2006 at the new Latvian Embassy in Washington, DC to celebrate and commemorate the Joint Baltic American National Committee’s (JBANC) 45th anniversary.

JBANC Managing Director Karl Altau opened the ceremony and introduced Martins Duhns, the ALA and JBANC President, who officially greeted the attendees and gave an overview of how JBANC came into existence in 1961, when the three main Baltic national organizations in the United States founded JBANC for the purpose of helping free the Baltic countries from Soviet occupation. “This cooperation,” said Duhns, became “a truly... unprecedented effort…”

Pointing to the long-lasting effectiveness of Baltic cooperation, Duhns observed that “United we are stronger. United we are smarter. United we are more effective.”

He thanked the Estonian American National Council, the American Latvian Association, and the Lithuanian American Council for supporting JBANC over the years, and also to other groups such as the U.S.-Baltic Foundation (USBF), the Baltic American Freedom League (BAFL), and the Lithuanian American Community for their steadfast assistance to the Baltic cause.

Representatives from the embassies of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were on hand to congratulate JBANC on its anniversary and to thank the organization for the work done for the benefit of the Baltic countries and U.S.-Baltic relations.

Lithuanian Ambassador Vygaudas Usackas remarked on the important role that JBANC and other Baltic-American organizations and individuals played in helping Lithuania regain its independence. Ambassador Usackas stressed the importance of JBANC’s mission and hoped that the cooperation will continue as the Baltic countries strive to be accepted into the visa waiver program.

Andres Kolk, the First Secretary at the Estonian Embassy, also pointed to the support that JBANC and other organizations provide for the well-being of the Baltic countries.

Maris Selga, the Deputy Chief of Mission of the Latvian Embassy and host for the event, used the occasion to thank JBANC for all the hard work in attaining common goals. Then First Lieutenant Karlis Lidaks, the Assistant Defense Attaché at the embassy, presented four commemorative Latvian Defense Minister’s medals for “Advancing Latvia’s Accession to NATO.”

These awards were presented to Martins Duhns, Janis Bolsteins, Raits Eglitis, and Karl Altau. The medal was established in 2004 “upon the admission of the Republic of Latvia to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, to express gratitude for contributions to the development of the Latvian defense and advancing Latvia to become a NATO member state.”

Then it was time for JBANC to honor its own. Certificates of Appreciation were presented to former JBANC board members in recognition of their hard work and dedication over the years.

Honorees were Vello Ederma, Marju Rink-Abel, Juhan Simonson (Estonian American National Council), Janis Kukainis, Dace Copeland, Janis Gramatins (American Latvian Association), and Jonas Genys, Jonas Rackauskas and Algis Rimas (Lithuanian American Council).
Meetings between the embassies and Baltic-American organizations have been held regularly since 1998. One of JBANC’s founders, Gunars Meierovics, now residing in Latvia, received special mention by JBANC chairman Peteris Blumbergs as the formal program concluded.

A selection of beers from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania helped enhance the festive mood of the occasion.

Earlier that day JBANC board members met with officials from the Office of Nordic and Baltic Affairs at the U.S. Department of State. Issues concerning U.S.-Baltic relations dominated the hour-long meeting.

That was followed by a gathering at the Latvian Embassy which included members of JBANC and its three parent organization, along with USBF, BAFL, the World Federation of Free Latvians, and representatives from the three Baltic embassies. The purpose of the meeting was to share news, updates, and other information about political developments, which included discussion of issues such as the visa waiver program, and energy security. Meetings between the embassies and Baltic-American organizations have been held regularly since 1998.

Karl Aita (JBANC), Erik Puskar (EANC), Mark Evans (Desk Officer for Estonia, Finland, and e-PINE), Henry Gaidis (LAC), Martins Duhrs (ALa), Ramunas Kondratas (LAC), Inga Lukavičiūtė (JBANC), Valdis Pavlovsks (BAFL), Victoria Middleton (Director, Nordic and Baltic Affairs), Mati Kāša (EANC), Tom Navratil (Deputy Director, Nordic and Baltic Affairs), Janis Kukains (World Federation of Free Latvians), Peteris Blumbergs (JBANC chairman), Raits Eglitis (ALA).
THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release May 15, 2006

SUSPENSION OF ENTRY AS IMMIGRANTS AND NONIMMIGRANTS
OF PERSONS RESPONSIBLE FOR POLICIES OR ACTIONS THAT
THREATEN THE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY IN BELARUS

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
A PROCLAMATION

In light of the importance to the United States of fostering democratic institutions in Belarus in order to help the Belarusian people achieve their aspirations for democracy and to help complete the transformation to a Europe whole, free, and at peace and given the suppression of human rights and democracy in Belarus, the fraud perpetrated during the recent Belarusian presidential campaign and election, the detention of peaceful protesters in Belarus, the persistent acts of corruption by Belarusian government officials in the performance of public functions, and the continued failure of Alyaksandr Lukashenka, Belarusian government officials, and others to support the rule of law, human rights commitments, and other principles of high priority to the United States, I have determined that it is in the interest of the United States to take all available measures to restrict the international travel and to suspend the entry into the United States, as immigrants or nonimmigrants, of members of the government of Alyaksandr Lukashenka and others detailed below who formulate, implement, participate in, or benefit from policies or actions, including electoral fraud, human rights abuses, and corruption, that undermine or injure democratic institutions or impede the transition to democracy in Belarus.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE W. BUSH, President of the United States of America, by the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, including section 212(f) of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, 8 U.S.C. 1182(f), and section 301 of title 3, United States Code, hereby find that the unrestricted immigrant and nonimmigrant entry into the United States of persons described in section 1 of this proclamation would, except as provided for in sections 2 and 3 of this proclamation, be detrimental to the interests of the United States.

I therefore hereby proclaim that:

Section 1. The entry into the United States, as immigrants or nonimmigrants, of the following persons is hereby suspended:

(a) Members of the government of Alyaksandr Lukashenka and other persons who formulate, implement, participate in, or benefit from policies or actions, including electoral fraud, human rights abuses, or corruption, that undermine or injure democratic institutions or impede the transition to democracy in Belarus;

(b) Persons who through their business dealings with Belarusian government officials derive significant financial benefit from policies or actions, including electoral fraud, human rights abuses, or corruption, that undermine or injure democratic institutions or impede the transition to democracy in Belarus; and

(c) The spouses of persons described in paragraphs (a) and (b) above.

Sec. 2. Section 1 of this proclamation shall not apply with respect to any person otherwise covered by section 1 where entry of such person would not be contrary to the interest of the United States.

Sec. 3. Persons covered by sections 1 and 2 of this proclamation shall be identified by the Secretary of State or the Secretary’s designee, in his or her sole discretion, pursuant to such procedures as the Secretary may establish under section 5 of this proclamation.

Sec. 4. Nothing in this proclamation shall be construed to derogate from United States Government obligations under applicable international agreements.

Sec. 5. The Secretary of State shall have responsibility for implementing this proclamation pursuant to such procedures as the Secretary may establish.

Sec. 6. This proclamation is effective immediately and shall remain in effect until such time as the Secretary of State determines that it is no longer necessary and should be terminated, either in whole or in part. Any such termination by the Secretary of State shall be published in the Federal Register.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twelfth day of May, in the year of our Lord two thousand six, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirtieth.

GEORGE W. BUSH
Telebridge Links U.S., Vilnius, and Brussels Following Belarus Election

On the morning of March 20, the day after the Belarus presidential election, a video link-up was held between Washington, DC, Vilnius (Seimas), and Brussels (European Union) to discuss the subsequent fall out and consequences of the undemocratic vote in Belarus.

Participating from the TV studio in the U.S. House of Representatives were Rep. Thaddeus McCotter, Lithuanian Ambassador Vygaudas Usackas, and Louis O’Neill of the U.S. State Department, during the telebridge. The middle photo shows participants in Washington, DC, Vilnius, and Brussels.

Coordination between the United States, the Baltic countries, and the European Union has been critical during this crisis for democracy.


Bottom images - Five-day demonstration in Central Square in Minsk was broken up by riot police on March 24, 2006.

Middle logo from “Free Internet Project” at: http://charter97.org/freemnet/eng.html

For up-to-date information on Belarus, please read the Belarusian Review: http://www.belreview.cz
On July 12, at the invitation of the State Department, members of JBANC met with John A. Cloud, who was sworn in at the State Department on Tuesday, July 18, as the new United States Ambassador to Lithuania.

The purpose of the meeting was to acquaint Amb. Cloud with the work of JBANC and to discuss with him a broad range of issues of interest to Baltic-Americans, especially the Lithuanian-American community. These issues include concerns about the fate of democracy in Russia and Moscow’s increasing interference in the internal affairs of its neighbors, especially through its use of energy supplies as a weapon of coercion; Russia’s unwillingness to come to terms with its Soviet past, including admitting that the Soviet occupation of the Baltic countries was illegal; JBANC’s efforts to remember and memorialize the victims of communism through its support of the work of the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation and other projects; the visa waiver issue; and the need for more people-to-people exchanges, particularly for young people who do not remember the Cold War and the ravages of communism.

Amb. Cloud has been a distinguished diplomat for 28 years, primarily serving in Europe. He has served two tours in Poland and two in Germany, most recently as Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Berlin. He was also the Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Mission to the European Union in Brussels (1999-2001) and Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for International Economic Affairs on the National Security staff from 2001-2003.

He received his B.A. from the University of Connecticut in 1975 and a Master’s in International Affairs from George Washington University in 1977. He is married and has two children.

Mr. Cloud was nominated by President Bush to the post of Ambassador to Lithuania on April 6. The nomination was confirmed by the Senate on May 26.

We wish him luck in his new position.
Ambassador John Cloud Swearing-In Ceremony on July 18, 2006 in the Benjamin Franklin Room at the Department of State

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice introduces John and Mary Cloud.

Secretary Rice administers the oath.

Inga Lukaviciute and Karl Altau wish Amb. and Mrs. Cloud well.

Ambassador Cloud signs the Oath of Office papers.

Ramunas Kondratus with Ambassador Cloud.
Latvian President Vike-Freiberga Addresses Joint Session of Congress; Senior aide to Sen. Obama meets with Baltic Reps

On June 7, Latvian President Vaira Vike-Freiberga made a historic speech to a joint session of the U.S. Congress in which she highlighted the support of the United States in standing firmly for fifty years against the illegal occupation of the Baltic countries, the fifteen fruitful years of new-found Baltic independence, and the NATO Summit to be held in Riga in November 2006.

She became the first Baltic leader to be given an opportunity to address the full Congress.

President Vike-Freiberga also spoke of the “wave of freedom and democratic reform [which] has been spreading throughout Central and Eastern Europe, extending from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea and into the Caucasus. One country after another, with the sad exception of Belarus, has been making a commitment to democracy, and has accepted the need for the rule of law and the respect of human rights.” Many representatives and constituents from the Latvian-American community also attended the special session in the U.S. Capitol. Members of the Senate and House Baltic Caucuses also participated at the event.

Shortly after President Vike-Freiberga’s address, several U.S. Baltic community representatives met with Michael Strautmanis, Chief Counsel to Illinois Senator Barack Obama (D).

In attendance were: Karl Altau, JBANC Managing Director, who was accompanied by JBANC intern Inga Lukaviciute, Janis Vīlčins, Chairman, United Latvian Associations of Chicago (ULAC) and Artis Inka, President, Midwest Baltic Coalition (MBC).

The friendly and animated meeting, as reported by Artis Inka on the Chicago Latvian website http://www.cikaq.com/cikaq/viewtopic.php?f=1171, covered several issues of interest to the Illinois Baltic community. Michael Strautmanis was very forthcoming and all the participants expressed enthusiasm about working together in the future. Senator Obama was also invited by the guests to join the Senate Baltic Freedom Caucus.

Karl Altau, Jānis Vilciņš, Michael Strautmanis, Chief Counsel to Sen. Obama, Inga Lukaviciute and Artis Inka.
Representatives Goodlatte and Musgrave Join
House Baltic Caucus

JBANC welcomes the newest members to the House Baltic Caucus - Congressman Bob Goodlatte (R) who represents Virginia’s Sixth District and Congresswoman Marilyn Musgrave (R) from Colorado’s Fourth District.

Congressman Goodlatte chairs the House Committee on Agriculture and the House Republican High Technology Working Group and co-chairs the Congressional Internet Caucus. He is Vice Chairman of the Courts, the Internet, and Intellectual Property Subcommittee and serves on the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security, and Claims. Rep. Goodlatte was also selected by Speaker Hastert to serve on the House Republican Cyber-Security Task Force.

After receiving a B.A. from Bates College in Maine, and a J.D. from Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia in 1977, Goodlatte was a staff aide for Congressman Caldwell Butler of Virginia from 1977-1979. He then practiced law before being first elected to Congress in 1992, where he is currently serving his seventh term.

In February 2006 Goodlatte, whose grandfather was born in Riga, Latvia, led a delegation of House members to Estonia and Latvia.

Other stops were in France, Belgium, and Poland. Besides Goodlatte, the delegation also included Representatives Kenny Marchant (R-TX), Collin Peterson (D-MN), and Mike McIntyre (D-NC). In Riga, the congressmen met with Latvian President Vaira Vike-Freiberga, Prime Minister Aigars Kalvitis, and toured the Occupation Museum. In Estonia, discussions with Foreign Minister Urmas Paet also touched upon the visa waiver issue.

Rep. Marilyn Musgrave was elected in 2002 and is now in her second term of office, where she sits on the House Committees on Agriculture, Small Business, Resources, and Education and the Workforce. She is Chairman of the Small Business Subcommittee on the Workforce, Empowerment and Government Programs. In addition, she is also a representative on the Republican Steering Committee and a member of the Republican Study Committee. Her district encompasses eastern Colorado and is one of the largest in the U.S. in area.

With the addition of Representatives Goodlatte and Musgrave, the House Baltic Caucus now has 70 members - 37 Democrats and 33 Republicans. Congressmen John Shimkus (R-IL) and Dennis Kucinich (D-OH) are the co-chairs of the Caucus since 1997. A complete list of House Baltic Caucus members is at: http://www.house.gov/shimkus/baltic/membership.shtml

The Senate Baltic Freedom Caucus is co-chaired by Senators Richard Durbin (D-IL) and Gordon Smith (R-OR). That Caucus currently has 13 members.
Lech Walesa at Victims of Communism Foundation Event in New York City

On April 26, 2006 in New York City’s historic Metropolitan Club, former Polish President Lech Walesa was honored by the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, lending prestige to the organization’s most successful fundraising event to date. Over 100 participants joined Walesa in paying their respects to those who have been and are still victimized by communism’s tyranny.

About 20 Baltic-Americans participated at the event, which was sponsored with $5000 contributions by the World Federation of Free Latvians and Lithuanian National Foundation (Tautos Fondas). Other Baltic organizations and individuals, both local and national, helped net over $80,000 for the occasion.

The event was preceded by a press conference with Walesa at the Polish consulate in New York City.

New York-area Baltic activists Ilmar Vanderer and Baiba Pinnis helped raise great awareness for the event, both with the local Baltic-American communities and with the New York City media.

This highly successful event brought the VOC Memorial Foundation very close to its fund-raising goal, which was finally reached in July.

Lech Walesa with Lithuanian National Foundation (Tautos Fondas) members Giedre Kumpikas, Ray Slizys, and John Stankunas. Photo by Vita Pagrizzanskaite.


(More event photos on page 21)
Overall Baltic contributions over the lifespan of the fundraising campaign are estimated to be approximately $100,000, according to JBANC Managing Director and VOC Memorial Foundation Board member Karl Altau.

Recently, significant support has come from the Czech Republic— the country’s Foreign Ministry and two political parties. In addition, former Czech President Vaclav Havel agreed in early July to join the Foundation’s International Advisory Council. The Foundation has applied to the National Park Service for a construction permit and expects to receive permission to proceed with ground-breaking in September. Dedication of the Memorial is scheduled for June 2007, the 20th anniversary of President Ronald Reagan’s historic Brandenburg Gate speech when he said, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" "Washington is a city of memorials and monuments to great events and great leaders," said Edwards. "How fitting that our Memorial with its bronze replica of the Goddess of Democracy erected in Tiananmen Square in 1989 will be located on Capitol Hill within view of the U.S. Capitol."

Founded in 1994, the non-profit Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation is authorized under P.L. 103-199 to design, build and maintain a memorial to the victims of communism. Its advisory councils also include American and foreign leaders such as Jeane Kirkpatrick, Bob Dole, Claiborne Pell, Mrs. Lane Kirkland, Lech Walesa, Elena Bonner, and Vytautas Landsbergis. The Foundation’s Honorary Chairman is President George W. Bush.
CEEC Delegation Meets with U.S. National Security Advisors on Eve of the G-8 Summit

Members of the Central and East European Coalition (CEEC) met on July 11, 2006 with National Security advisors to President Bush and Vice-President Cheney to discuss their concerns on the eve of the G-8 Summit, which was held July 15-17, in St. Petersburg, Russia.

CEEC members expressed apprehension about Russia’s presence in the G-8, the group of seven of the world’s leading economic powers (U.S., Britain, Germany, France, Italy, Canada, Japan), and Russia, as the eighth member. Russia has shown a marked reversal in its path to democracy, with the current Moscow regime increasingly tightening civil and press freedoms, while ramping up economic pressures on its neighbors, especially regarding energy security.

Issues discussed at the meeting centered on worries about the Russian Federation’s internal democratization, economic pressures and energy security, the situation in Belarus, “frozen conflicts” in Georgia and Moldova, and NATO enlargement. The CEEC also keyded in on Vice President Dick Cheney’s May 4 speech in Vilnius, in which Cheney strongly promoted a “Freedom Agenda” and expressed the Administration’s worries about aforementioned issues, along with the corruption still pervasive in much of the region [see JBANC letter to Vice-President Cheney].

The CEEC emphasized that it is not an anti-Russia organization and supports U.S. engagement with the Russian Federation. However, the CEEC emphasized that the Russian regime needs to act responsibly if it wants to be treated as a partner. It should be held to the same standards as the other members. This is also important as Moscow strives for WTO membership. Russia also currently chairs the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers until November of this year. In operating according to acceptable standards, Moscow cannot pressure its neighbors and intervene in their internal affairs. At the same time, the CEEC articulated concerns that neighboring countries have the right to be nervous at Russia’s behavior. For instance, Moscow hasn’t been able to come to honest terms with its Soviet past, including admitting that the Soviet occupation of the Baltic countries was illegal.

Questions to the NSC were directed by Frank Koszorus (American Hungarian Federation), Asta Banionis (Lithuanian American Community), Michael Sawkiw (Ukrainian Congress Committee of America), Ramunas Kondratas (Lithuanian American Council and JBANC), and Karl Altai of JBANC. Mati Köiva, of the Estonian American National Council, also participated.

(Continued on page 21)
On March 29 2006, the Central and East European Coalition (CEEC), along with the Congressional Caucus on Central and Eastern Europe, and the National Endowment for Democracy, hosted an event in the Rayburn Building on Capitol Hill to draw attention to issues related to that region.

The reception featured speeches by Congressman Dan Lipinski (D-IL), and Belarusian student activist Iryna Vidanava, who spoke about the March 19 presidential election sham in Belarus.

Vidanava has remained positive despite the harsh crackdown against the Belarus opposition’s attempts to prolong a “Denim Revolution” demonstration in the Central Square in Minsk (a la the Ukrainian Orange Revolution) following the March election.

In her comments at the reception she said that “This election and the events after it are a victory for the Belarusian people. It is a victory of freedom of spirit, of a strong desire for democracy and freedom. The regime has suffered a defeat because the people overcame fear to express and defend their opinions in the face of overwhelming state propaganda, intimidation and repression.” Vidanava also thanked the U.S. Congress for its support of the Belarusian democratic movement and asked that Congress reauthorize the Belarus Democracy Act (BDA), which first passed and was signed into law in 2004.

The BDA provides support for democratic institutions, human rights, and rule of law in Belarus, while imposing sanctions on the government and some officials associated with the Lukashenka regime.

The CEEC worked closely with CEE Caucus co-chairmen Thaddeus McCotter (R-MI) and Dan Lipinski (D-IL), and their respective staff members Andy Anuzis and Ryan Quinn in coordinating the reception. Baltic Caucus co-chairman John Shimkus (R-IL), who had just traveled to Belarus to observe the elections there, and his staff helped reserve the room. Rodger Potocki was the NED liaison for the event.

JBANC members in attendance were new chairman Peteris Blumbergs, Janis Bolsteins, Ramunas Kondratas, and Karl Altai, who was the master of ceremonies for the event.
Dear Americans of Baltic Heritage and Friends of the Baltics,

This year, the Joint Baltic American National Committee (JBANC) proudly celebrates its 45th anniversary. On April 27, 1961, the Presidents of three Baltic American organizations met in Washington, D.C. to establish this new organization for Baltic cooperation. Those three far-sighted leaders were Julius Kangur of the Estonian National Committee, Peteris Lejins of the American Latvian Association, and Leonard Simutis of the Lithuanian American Council.

The launching of this new organization was not just a symbolic act, but rather the laying of a firm foundation for future Baltic cooperation and activities. While it is true that the various Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian communities throughout the United States had on prior occasions worked together, the foundation of JBANC was truly an unprecedented effort to unite the three groups formally for a common cause.

Forty-five years ago the world was a different place. We were in the midst of the Cold War and the Baltic peoples were suffering under the illegal yoke of the Soviet Russian regime. The U.S. Government’s non-recognition policy regarding the Soviet occupation and annexation of the three Baltic countries gave us encouragement and sustenance to carry on our campaign. And even in these darkest days, the native Baltic inhabitants never lost their perseverance and will for freedom, and represented the cutting edge of dissent in the USSR.

Over the years, many Baltic Americans, from youths to seniors, have had the opportunity to work for JBANC in some capacity and to gain knowledge and experience in Baltic affairs. JBANC has also provided a forum through such events as conferences, workshops, and Congressional receptions, for members of the Baltic organizations to meet and learn from each other how to plan and carry out tasks in a united manner. In 1991, freedom and independence were at long last regained by the Baltic countries whose steadfast, unyielding drive for sovereignty was a major cause of the dissolution of the Soviet Russian empire. This triumph was a cause for real celebration and great joy. JBANC can proudly look back at its record – we never wavered in our fight for the cause of freedom in the lands of our heritage.

We wish to thank the Estonian American National Council, the American Latvian Association, and the Lithuanian American Council for their generous support of JBANC. We wish to thank Baltic American groups such as the U.S. Baltic Foundation, the Baltic American Freedom League, and the Lithuanian American Community for their steadfast support.

Even though the Baltic countries are independent again, our work is not done. Fifty years of Soviet occupation have left deep scars and these countries continue to need our help in the difficult rebuilding process. Gaining membership in NATO and the European Union constituted major strides in the areas of defensive and economic security.

We wish JBANC continued success in its future endeavors!

Sincerely,

Martins Duhms
JBANC President
June 1, 2006

The Vice President of the
United States
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Vice President:

We write to congratulate you on being the first Vice President of the United States to visit Lithuania and to thank you for your open and frank remarks at the May 6 Vilnius Conference.

Your comments regarding the 50-year Soviet occupation of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, in pointing out the sovereignty of these countries was stolen and that the United States never recognized the legitimacy of that occupation are much appreciated by the one million Americans of Baltic descent. The U.S. non-recognition policy was the flickering light that gave us hope over half a century until independence was restored fifteen years ago.

We agree with you that the “democratic unity of Europe ensures the peace of Europe,” and we commend the commitment of the United States to the development and progress of democracy in Europe. Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus has also emphasized that “the transatlantic action by the EU and the United States in crafting a Europe whole and free is essential for our success.”

This spirit must transcend borders. We too want to see the Russian Federation “in the category of healthy, vibrant democracies,” and as a peaceful and cooperative neighbor and wish to see that it avoids the temptation to use oil and gas to intimidate, or even blackmail its neighbors.

By also speaking out against the increasing limitations by Moscow towards human and civil rights, including pressures on the rights of religion, minority populations, and the news media, you have underscored the importance of remaining vigilant and committed towards the basics of freedom and democracy. These standards must remain universal.

Once again, we thank you for your attention to these critical issues, especially on the eve of the G-8 Summit.

Sincerely yours,

Peteris Blumbergs

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tel. 301.340.1954 fax 301.309.1406
e-mail: jbanc@jbanc.org internet: http://jbanc.org
The following are excerpts from a speech given by Vice President Dick Cheney at the Vilnius Conference on May 4, 2006

THE VICE PRESIDENT:
Thank you very much. Distinguished guests, colleagues, and friends, and my thanks for the welcome, and for the opportunity to join all of you today in this very important conference. I’m honored to be in your company.

Vice President Dick Cheney delivers the keynote speech at the Vilnius Conference 2006 in Vilnius, Lithuania, Thursday May 4, 2006. The conference brings together delegations from the Baltic and Black Sea regions that are committed to the advancement of democracy and dedicated to working together to reinforce common values and regional interests. White House photo by David Bohrer

I appreciate the thoughtful words of our co-hosts, President Kaczynski and President Adamkus, as well. And I want to extend special thanks to the government and the people of Lithuania for the hospitality shown to me and my wife.

Mr. President, this is our first visit to your country, and to see this beautiful part of the world with our own eyes is an experience we’ll always cherish. We’re grateful for the warm and the welcoming spirit of Lithuania. And to the citizens of this land, and to all the countries represented in the hall today, we bring friendship and good wishes from our President, George Bush, and from the people of the United States.

-It is fitting that we should gather in the Baltic region -- the very front lines of freedom in the modern world. For several generations, Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia were counted as provinces of an empire. In fact you were ancient nations, with your sovereignty lost by theft. The United States never recognized the legitimacy of that occupation, and we kept faith with you until the day your independence was restored.

In these 15 years, the Baltics have shown how far nations can progress when they embrace freedom, serve the interests of their people, and hold steadily to the path of reform. You have thrown off the stagnation of imperial dictatorship and a command economy, and now your children look to a future of promise as citizens of independent, prosperous democracies. You give both aid and inspiration to those who share this dream, from countries nearby, to the new democracies of the broader Middle East. Because you have persevered, you are now part of the family of democratic countries in the European Union, and your security is protected by the greatest partnership for freedom in our world, the NATO Alliance.

-This progress would not have been possible without leadership -- from patriots with names like Sakharov, Mindszenty, Walesa, Havel -- who, in decades of striving, challenged dictators, spoke the truth without apology, and refused to compromise their liberty. Their courage and their faithfulness to principle helped tip the balance of Europe toward freedom. And they provide a moral example for our own time. Ladies and gentlemen, if you and I stand firmly for the principles we know to be true, we also can build a legacy of freedom and progress, and make this young century a time of rising hopes and lasting peace.

-The freedom movement is far from over, and far from tired. And we still live in a time of heroes. From Freedom Square in Tbilisi, to Independence Square in Kiev, and beyond, patriots have stepped forward to claim their just inheritance of liberty and independence. They have taken on tremendous duties. And they have earned the respect of a watching world.

-There is no single model of democracy; our systems vary according to the unique traditions of our countries, the languages we speak, and the events and the heroes of our history. Yet healthy, self-governing, forward-looking societies have the same basic strengths. Democracy starts with citizens casting their votes, but that is only the beginning. Elections must be fair, and regular, and truly competitive. Men and women must be free to speak their minds -- and here a simple test is proposed by the former Soviet dissident Natan Sharansky:

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"Can a person walk into the middle of the town square and express his or her views without fear of arrest, imprisonment, or physical harm? If he can, then that person is living in a free society."

We can also take heart from the experience of Eastern and Central Europe after the Cold War. In the 1990s, many predicted that the move toward democracy and free markets would end in failure. And it is true there were setbacks. Some parties promised reform and did not deliver -- but that was not the end of reform. Some economies faced painful dislocations -- but that was not the end of reform. In all cases, nations that moved forward with a reform agenda have been successful. We must keep in mind that progress cannot fairly be assessed by a single moment in time, whether good or bad -- but instead by whether there is steady, hopeful advancement over time.

The spread of democracy is an unfolding of history; it is a benefit to all, and a threat to none. The best neighbor a country can have is a democracy -- stable, peaceful, and open to relations of commerce and cooperation instead of suspicion and fear. The nations of the West have produced the most prosperous, tolerant system ever known. And because that system embraces the hopes and dreams of all humanity, it has changed our world for the better. We can and should build upon that successful record. The system that has brought such great hope to the shores of the Baltic can bring the same hope to the far shores of the Black Sea, and beyond. What is true in Vilnius is also true in Tbilisi and Kiev, and true in Minsk, and true in Moscow.

All of us are committed to democratic progress in Belarus. That nation has suffered in major wars and experienced terrible losses, and now its people are denied basic freedoms by the last dictatorship in Europe. With us today are democracy advocates from Belarus. We welcome you to this conference. I had also expected to meet today with the opposition leader, Alyaksander Milinkevich -- but he was recently put in jail by the regime in Minsk. The regime should end this injustice and free Mr. Milinkevich, along with the other democracy advocates held in captivity. The world knows what is happening in Belarus. Peaceful demonstrators have been beaten, dissidents have vanished, and a climate of fear prevails under a government that subverts free elections and bans your own country's flag. There is no place in a Europe whole and free for a regime of this kind. The people of Belarus deserve better. You have the right to determine your destiny. And your great nation has a future in the community of democracies.

America and all of Europe also want to see Russia in the category of healthy, vibrant democracies. Yet in Russia today, opponents of reform are seeking to reverse the gains of the last decade. In many areas of civil society -- from religion and the news media, to advocacy groups and political parties -- the government has unfairly and improperly restricted the rights of her people. Other actions by the Russian government have been counterproductive, and could begin to affect relations with other countries. No legitimate interest is served when oil and gas become tools of intimidation or blackmail, either by supply manipulation or attempts to monopolize transportation. And no one can justify actions that undermine the territorial integrity of a neighbor, or interfere with democratic movements.

Russia has a choice to make. And there is no question that a return to democratic reform in Russia will generate further success for its people and greater respect among fellow nations. Democratization in Russia helped to end the Cold War, and the Russian people have made heroic progress in overcoming the miseries of the 20th century. They deserve now to live out their peaceful aspirations under a government that upholds freedom at home, and builds good relations abroad.

None of us believes that Russia is fated to become an enemy. A Russia that increasingly shares the values of this community can be a strategic partner and a trusted friend as we work toward common goals. In that spirit, the leading industrialized nations will engage Russia at the Group of Eight Summit in St. Petersburg this summer. We will make the case, clearly and confidently, that Russia has nothing to fear and everything to gain from having strong, stable democracies on its borders,
and that by aligning with the West, Russia joins all of us on a course to prosperity and greatness. The vision we affirm today is of a community of sovereign democracies that transcend old grievances, that honor the many links of culture and history among us, that trade in freedom, respect each other as great nations, and strive together for a century of peace.

Our cooperation is vital, because democracies have great duties in today’s world. The challenges of a new era require concerted action by nations and peoples who believe liberty is worth defending. For the sake of our security, we must act decisively against known dangers. And to secure freedom and peace for generations to come, we must be true to the democratic dreams of others, and remember our brothers and sisters who have kept their hopes in exile.

The end of the Cold War did not usher in an era of quiet and tranquility. A new enemy of freedom has emerged -- and it is focused, resourceful, and rapacious. This enemy perverts a religious faith to serve a dark political objective -- to establish, by violence and intimidation, a totalitarian empire that denies all political and religious freedom. To that end, the terrorists do not seek to build large standing armies. Instead, they want to demoralize free nations with dramatic acts of murder, and to gain weapons of mass destruction so they can hold power by threat or blackmail. We need not have any illusions about their ambitions, because the terrorists have stated them clearly. They have killed many thousands in many countries. They would, if able, kill hundreds of thousands more -- and still not be finished.

-- Our commitment to this cause is being tested today in Afghanistan and in Iraq. The task is difficult, but the progress has been steady, and the nations of our coalition have performed superbly. All 26 members of NATO have contributed assistance to operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. And some of the most steadfast allies in the cause are nations that have recently won their own freedom. From a Lithuanian Provincial Reconstruction team in Afghanistan; to Latvian military training teams in Iraq; to Estonian infantrymen; to Georgian security forces; to Polish and Romanian army units -- countries that have known tyranny themselves have a clear understanding of what is at stake. And they have generously taken up the cause of democracy in other lands.

-- We have learned, ladies and gentlemen, that the desire of human beings to be free is the most potent force on this Earth. Tyrants may, for a time, deny the hopes of others, violate the rights of others, and even take the lives of others. Yet they have no power to inspire hope or to raise the sights of a nation. The ideals that you and I believe in -- liberty, and equality, and justice under law -- speak to the best in mankind.

We have seen these ideals lift up whole countries and secure generations of peace. And we will see that promise renewed in our own time, in places near and far. So let us persevere in freedom’s cause -- united, confident, and unafraid.

Thank you. (Applause.)
The CEEC met with NSC again on August 2 to follow-up on the previous meeting and to share thoughts and impressions about the G-8 summit. Dr. J.D. Crouch, Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor led the meeting.

The Central and East European Coalition (CEEC), founded in 1993, comprises 19 national membership organizations representing more that 20 million Americans who trace their heritage to that part of the world. The CEEC, as proclaimed in its mission statement, believes strongly that the long-term national security and economic interests of the United States demand an unwavering commitment to the transition of Central and East European countries to fully democratic governments with free market economies. This goal can only be achieved by active and continued U.S. engagement in that region.

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Pictured are: Damon Wilson (Director for Central and Eastern Europe), Gordon Hendrickson (Special Advisor for European Affairs for the Vice President), Michael Sawkiw (Ukrainian Congress Committee of America), John Karch (Slovak League of America), Asta Bantionis (Lithuanian American Community), Frank Koszorus (American Hungarian Federation), Tom Graham (Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Russian Affairs), Armand Scala (Congress of Roman Americans), Judy Ansley (Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director of European Affairs), Ramanas Kondratas (Lithuanian American Council and JBANC), Jaroslav Slavik (Czechoslovak National Council of America), Laszlo Pasztor (National Federation of American Hungarians), Barry Jackson (Deputy Assistant to the President and the Chief Deputy to the Senior Advisor), Karl Altan (JBANC), Rudi Slavoff (Bulgarian Institute for Research and Analysis), Barbara Borzuchowska (Polish American Congress).

Not pictured are: Dr. J.D. Crouch (Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor), Ellen King (Hungarian American Coalition). Photo by Inga Lukavcicute (JBANC).

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Lech Walesa surrounded by supporting Latvians at the April 26th event. Maria Malisz, Jana Bekstina, Dagvans Vallens, UN ambassador-Solveiga Sileikae, Ines Bieunier, Jana Bieunier, daughter Maria Walesa, Karl Altan, Vija Bieunier, Babia Pirits. Photo by Sasauns Suto.

Letter from Rep. Christopher Smith, Co-Chairman, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE)

August 2, 2006

Help Bring Democracy to Belarus
Cosponsor the Belarus Democracy Reauthorization Act

Dear Colleague:

Last week, H.R. 5948, the Belarus Democracy Reauthorization Act (BDRA) was introduced. The current cosponsors are Reps. Tom Lantos, Thaddeus McCotter, and Robert Wexler. The BDRA expands upon and reauthorizes certain provisions of the Belarus Democracy Act, which is aimed at promoting democratic development, human rights and rule of law in the Republic of Belarus, and supporting the consolidation and strengthening of Belarus’ sovereignty and independence.

As Europe’s last dictator, Aleksandr Lukashenka continues to trample the fundamental rights of his own people. As a result, Belarus has the poorest human rights record of any country in Europe today. Increasingly, Belarus, which borders on the EU and NATO, has been driven into self-imposed isolation under Lukashenka devoid of legitimate leadership or accountability.

Lukashenka’s regime has repeatedly violated basic freedoms of speech, expression, assembly, association and religion and the independent media, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), trade unions, and democratic opposition have all faced repression, including closure. The March 19 presidential elections were neither free nor fair, continuing a disturbing pattern of undemocratic elections. Over 1,000 democratic activists were arrested for their participation in peaceful post-election protests. There are highly credible allegations of Lukashenka regime involvement in the murders of opposition figures and a journalist. Furthermore, a BDA-mandated report transmitted to Congress in March clearly indicates a pattern of Belarusian sales or delivery of weapons or weapons-related technologies to regimes of concern.

Please join in this effort to facilitate Belarus’ integration into democratic Europe and move toward the protection of democratic principles, human rights and the rule of law. The people of Belarus deserve a chance for a brighter future free of repression and fear. Please have your staff contact Orest Deychakiwsky at the Helsinki Commission at 5-1901 or e-mail orest.deychak@mail.house.gov regarding cosponsorship.

Attached please find the text of the BDRA and a brief summary of the legislation.

Sincerely,

/s/
Christopher H. Smith, M.C.
JBANC Board and Staff Update

The Estonian American National Council (EANC) elected a new Board during its annual meeting on June 3. The new EANC president, and thus JBANC’s newest Board member, is Marju Rink-Abel.

Marju has been with the EANC Board since 1989, serving as the organization’s Vice-President and Treasurer from 1996 – 2006. Her election to the EANC presidency ushers in her second stint with JBANC. She was a representative to JBANC from 1989 - 1999. On the evening prior to her election as EANC president, JBANC honored Marju for her past service to our organization with an achievement award. JBANC is happy to have the opportunity again to work closely with Marju.

In her professional life, Marju has worked for over 30 years with the Government Accountability Office. She has degrees from the University of Pennsylvania (BA), Columbia University (MS), and University of Maryland (MS). She lives in Maryland with her husband and son.

Marju became EANC’s president after former EANC president Mati Kõiva stepped down after ten years of dedicated service to EANC and JBANC. Mati continues to serve on the EANC executive council and remains as the EANC representative to the Central and East European Coalition (CEEC).

Inga Lukaviciute Joins JBANC office

JBANC is pleased to have Inga Lukaviciute as its summer 2006 intern.

Inga hails from Panevezys, Lithuania, and graduated from Lithuania Christian College in Klaipeda with a B.A. degree in Liberal Arts in English. She was editor of the student newspaper and yearbook as well as an avid participant in many extracurricular and volunteer activities.

Inga came to Washington, D.C. after receiving her M.A. in Mass Communication and Journalism from California State University, Fresno. At Fresno State Inga was active in student life. As a graduate assistant, she helped organize journalism conferences, workshops, and symposia. Inga spoke on topics related to Lithuania at public cultural events and at numerous campus events. She is interested in international relations and hopes to either continue her studies at George Washington University or get a job with a non-profit research organization.

Thanks to Summer Volunteers!

JBANC would also like to thank its summer student volunteers for 2006 – Aili Puskar, Alissa Altau, and Davis Bolsteins.

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Inga Lukaviciute, 2006 Intern
Other Happenings of Interest:

The passing of former Estonian president Lennart Meri is observed at the Embassy of Estonia in March.


June 16, 2006 at AABS conference, George Washington University. Estonian-Canadian documentary film director Marcus Kõgba is flanked by Maria Kristiina Onguusk and Vello Ederma. Kõgba's film "Gulag 113" tells the story of his grandfather, who suffered unjustly as a prisoner of the Soviets. The film was featured at a conference reception.

Annapolis mayor Ellen Moyer with Tallinn mayor Jari Ruus at Reynolds Tavern in Annapolis on July 6. The get together, which included a number of members of the local Estonian community, was hosted jointly by the City of Annapolis, the Consortium for Mid-Atlantic Baltic Education and Commerce (MBEC), and JBANC.

Lithuanian Ambassador Vygandas Usackas with Congressman John Shimkus (center) and Deputy Chief of Mission Kornelija Jurgaitiene. Photo courtesy of Lithuanian Embassy.