



For Immediate Release:
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WASHINGTON, D.C.— Speaking to members of the Croatian American Association at the annual banquet in Chicago on March 13, 2004, Rep. Henry Hyde said that he would continue to personally work with CAA to ensure quick NATO membership for Croatia.

Part of that promise was realized on March 30, 2004 when Rep. Doug Bereuter managed to get overwhelming approval (422 versus 2) for H.RES.558, a non-binding resolution that gave U.S. approval for new members of NATO and expressed the sense of Congress that Croatia should be made a member by 2007. Rep. Bereuter, who chairs the Europe subcommittee under Hyde's chairmanship of the International Relations Committee, noted in the resolution the "...the Government of Croatia elected in November 2003 has demonstrated its commitment to implementing reforms and meeting conditions for integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions, including the defense reforms necessary for NATO membership ..."

The passage of the resolution followed the south lawn ceremony hosted by President George Bush on Monday, March 29, 2004, to welcome the prime ministers of the seven new NATO member countries as well as those of Albania, Croatia and Macedonia, three nations that are seeking NATO membership. The White House personally invited American organizations to attend the historic event, including the CAA.

Croatia still has some obstacles to overcome before the U.S. will allow Croatia to join NATO. While attending the UN General Assembly in New York in September 2003, State Department officials meeting with President Stipe Mesic made it clear that American support for Croatia's NATO membership depended in part on the signing of the Article 98 agreement exempting US soldiers from the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague. State Department officials recently told CAA that condition has not changed.

CAA's close cooperation with Rep. Hyde, the powerful chairman of the House International Relations Committee, has resulted in a number of key developments for Croatians both in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Rep. Hyde held hearings on July 25, 2001 at the urging of the CAA that were the first in Congress to hear from His Eminence Vinko Cardinal Puljic, Archbishop of Sarajevo, and His Excellency Most Reverend Dr. Ratko Peric, Bishop of Mostar, regarding ethnic and religious discrimination under the Dayton Accords. It was also CAA that worked exclusively with the International Relations Committee to hold the hearings in February 28 2002 that were the only ones to examine the influence of international politics on the judicial process at the ICTY Hague tribunal.

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