

*July 25, 2003 – Aug. 4, 2003*

# CODEL Hastert

*A travel journal of meetings with our European allies in security and trade led by  
Speaker of the House J. Dennis Hastert*

*By Congressman Peter Hoekstra  
Michigan's Second Congressional District*

## DAY ONE

### Washington

*Friday, July 25*

I fully expect this congressional delegation (CODEL) trip with Speaker of the House J. Dennis Hastert to offer substantial and insightful new information about our European allies, but for now all of us who are participating feel exhausted before we even leave Washington. The House stayed in session until 2:30 a.m. on Thursday morning and 3 a.m. on Friday morning. The result: two nights before we depart for Europe, we have slept a total of seven hours.

The flight on Friday leaves from Andrews Air Force Base on time at 6:30 p.m. and we expect to arrive in Wales early Saturday morning. Accounting for the time difference creates another short night that allows us four hours of sleep. Nobody complains, however. Everyone looks forward to interesting meetings with four key U.S. allies during the next nine days.

I also leave knowing that Congress made significant progress during the last week concerning issues on which I have worked extensively. The House Committee on the Judiciary finally passed my Federal Prison Industries reform bill on Friday morning after a few hiccups during the week. The Senate also passed legislation (later signed by the President) that renames the visitor center at Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument in Arizona after Cadillac native Kris Eggle. Funding for essential dredging projects in West Michigan was also included in the House Energy and Water appropriations bill.

A national issue I have sponsored and heavily promoted – a measure to re-import drugs from Canada and Europe – also passed the House last week. (Little do I realize that the drug companies will hound me on this issue all over Europe.)

Most meetings in coming days will include sessions with our parliamentary counterparts, U.S. embassy staff, business groups and local government officials. The Speaker also schedules cultural events so that we all experience a taste of the country, not just the inside of conference rooms. Where appropriate, I will break from the delegation to meet

with individuals who might have an interest in sharing information or observations based on my assignment to the House Select Committee on Intelligence.

## DAYS TWO & THREE

### Wales

*Saturday and Sunday, July 26 & 27*

As third in line to the presidency, the Speaker secures us access to high-level government officials, and they closely follow what he says. He always delivers informative and captivating speeches. He sets a pace that ensures that he is ready for every meeting, that the agendas have been established and understood by everyone involved. Preparation is absolutely critical.

On Sunday night we meet with delegates of the Welsh National Assembly and the leader of the British House of Commons, Peter Hain, who is also from Wales. Various representatives of businesses with ties to the United States attend as well.

During dinner, several issues concerning Wales are discussed, including:

- Education – The United Kingdom establishes educational guidelines, but Wales is granted extensive freedom with its programs to meet these guidelines. They call the distribution of British education funds to Wales block grants, but I am unsure whether they would be the equivalent of what we call block grants in the United States.
- Early childhood education – At the same time that the U.S. House passes a Head Start reform bill that places greater emphasis on early childhood cognitive skills, Wales is reforming its early childhood learning programs by requiring more emphasis on the development of social skills. Both Wales and the United States struggle with the same issue: How do you help prepare those children who must overcome various obstacles in their lives to learn and to function at an appropriate level upon reaching school age? Neither country has yet found an answer or approach with which they appear to be satisfied.
- K-12 education – Government funding for religious and public schools is essentially equal.
- Higher education – It does not cost much in the United Kingdom to receive a post-secondary education, but only about 15 percent of students pursue one. Tuition costs about \$1,500 per year for undergraduates. At Cardiff University, about 65 percent of students in the graduate program are Americans who pay about \$13,000 per year to attend to attend.

- Economic development – General Electric recently built a facility to refurbish a certain type of jet engine that is used throughout the world. As an incentive to build the facility in Wales, the government matched G.E.'s investment with a contribution equaling 40 percent of the cost of development.

Wales closely resembles an American state, although it is granted significantly less autonomy and absolutely no authority to raise revenues. All taxes are levied and collected by the United Kingdom and distributed to Wales.

Finally, there are issues raised here that will be raised at nearly every meeting during this trip:

- An expression of appreciation by the Speaker to our host country for its support of our efforts in Iraq and the continuing war on terrorism.
- Genetically modified organisms, a discussion often initiated by the Speaker.
- The re-importation of prescription drugs from European countries into the United States, a measure that the House passed the week before I left for this trip. When representatives of the pharmaceutical industry are present, as they are in Wales, Denmark and the Netherlands, they are so aggressive that they become annoying.

## DAY FOUR

*Monday, July 28*

We resume our meetings from the day before, turning the discussion toward the war with Iraq. The topic has clearly been a political hot potato in the United Kingdom and some believe that the debate will subside only when we find Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction.

Health care is also an emerging issue in the United Kingdom. The country has increased spending on health care at a rate of 40 percent over the last five years, but the backlog of individuals waiting to see specialists has increased dramatically. This should be very instructive for those who seek universal health care for the United States. The market in the United States allocates about 14 percent of our Gross Domestic Product to health care vs. about 8 percent in the United Kingdom. U.S. health care has problems we need to solve, but a national health care system does not appear to be the solution to me.

Three final observations about Wales:

- The people are thrilled that the Ryder Cup will be played in Wales in coming years.

- The people are proud of their heritage and are returning Welsh culture to the classroom.
- Members of the congressional delegation and Welsh Parliamentarians agree that life is a lot less hectic when the House or the National Assembly is not in session.

## Denmark

We meet with Danish Parliamentarians both at the Danish House of Parliament and again later at dinner. Shortly after opening introductions, we begin a question-and-answer period in which our hosts hope to better understand U.S. views toward Iraq and the United Nations to assist them in their internal debate about support for efforts in Iraq. Danish views expressed to us mirror those of the United Kingdom; there is no wavering or questioning by those who supported the war on their decisions, but a need is felt to better effectively communicate to the country's citizenry the compelling case for action. They believe that they are feeling a spillover from the debate in the United Kingdom. We also meet with representatives of parties who strongly opposed the war.

A second question is raised that is very interesting. The questioner, who sits on the country's opposition party and stands against current efforts in Iraq, essentially asks why the United States is so uninformed on global issues. She bases her question on hearing that more than 70 percent of members of Congress do not possess a passport.

The question underlies the purpose of this and other congressional delegation trips to dispel inaccurate beliefs about the United States. I do not dispute that Americans are generally less informed than their European counterparts on international issues, but only 15 percent of members of Congress do not possess a passport. These discussions continue through dinner, although they are disrupted at one point so that the Speaker can leave to meet with Danish Queen Margrethe II.

Dinner proves very informative. Discussions with our counterparts in a less formal setting enable us to discuss some issues in more depth. I take the opportunity to probe more deeply into their concerns about genetically modified organisms. The particular individual with whom I speak is not concerned about the science, but that world agriculture will be dominated by three to five agricultural companies.

Another person raises the issue of a Buy American provision inserted into defense legislation recently passed by the House. Because Denmark is partnering with the United States on a new fighter jet, he is unsure of how the Buy American provision will affect the program. Secondly, in the Senate companion bill a number of countries are exempted from the Buy American provision – some which did not support us during this latest engagement in Iraq. However, Denmark, a country that did support us, is not included on the list.

He wonders why the United States supports some countries that did not support us but does not support all of our allies. The easy answer: that's the Senate for you. The longer

answer is that I will follow up on the question by tracking its resolution in conference and voicing my support for Denmark.

Rep. Jim Nussle of Iowa is the star of the Denmark trip. Of Danish descent and having spent time in Denmark during his school years, Rep. Nussle's background is highlighted by Speaker Hastert in all of our meetings. He is also awarded the honor of offering a Danish-language toast to our hosts at dinner. He performs admirably and I realize that I might be offered the same opportunity when we arrive in the Netherlands.

## DAY FIVE

*Tuesday, July 29*

We attend a breakfast meeting with the American Chamber of Commerce in Denmark. The group prides itself on hosting the largest Independence Day celebration outside of the United States.

Before Speaker Hastert addresses the crowd, someone mentions that she finds it ironic that some U.S. states cut tourism promotion budgets because of decreasing state revenues. She says that Danes are able to travel to the United States, and because of the current exchange rate between our countries, they can fund their travel expenses through savings on the prices of goods and services purchased on trips to the United States. Other topics of discussion include restating the importance of Americans visiting countries like Denmark and demonstrating their interest in them. President Clinton was very popular in Denmark because he spent time in the country.

Speaker Hastert addresses the group and answers questions on Iraq, drug re-importation, genetically modified organisms and access to U.S. higher education programs by foreign students.

Also on Tuesday, we meet with various business organizations at a reception. Guess who shows up? Representatives from the pharmaceutical companies, again driving at the issue of re-importation.

## DAY SIX

### The Netherlands

*Wednesday, July 30*

We leave Denmark in the morning for the Netherlands to attend a luncheon with our Dutch counterparts. It is an awesome setting in the banquet room of a grand hotel in downtown Amsterdam. The United States and the Dutch are working together on several issues, including the war in Iraq, container security through the port of Rotterdam (the most advanced system in the world) and the war on drugs. The discussions are similar to what we have heard in other meetings.

As lunch concludes, some in the Dutch group express an interest in closer ties between our countries, a type of parliamentary exchange program. Speaker Hastert then stresses the cultural diversity and heritage of the U.S. delegation and requests that I propose a toast, spoken in Dutch of course. Similar to Denmark, where Rep. Nussle offered his toast, our Dutch hosts are surprised that a member of our delegation speaks their language somewhat fluently.

The long luncheon ends, and we visit the Van Gogh Museum before a reception with the Vice Mayor of Amsterdam. Various local officials and business groups are represented, including the pharmaceuticals. They must have issued an all-points bulletin on me because they are on me as soon as I enter. I endure the harassment for a few minutes, although it is becoming increasingly irritating to tolerate their constant badgering. These people have already visited most media outlets in my district and purchased radio and television advertisements attacking my position, and now they are following me around the world. Despite this, I still have not spoken with one who can answer the basic question: "Why should Americans pay three to four times the price paid for prescription drugs by the rest of the world?" The Speaker rescues me by requesting that I offer a toast at this reception as well. I propose the toast and spend the balance of the reception speaking with Amsterdam's Vice Mayor, who has also arranged for a canal cruise through Amsterdam.

Later, at dinner, the prescription drug guy returns and clearly wants to sit with my wife and me. The Speaker rescues me again by asking us to fill two empty seats at his table.

We accomplish our mission in the Netherlands. I find a droppe winkel (licorice store) and load up. It is time to call it a day and prepare for Spain in the morning.

A final observation: Prior to leaving for the trip, a letter was published in a local newspaper about why the Dutch hate Americans. There was no doubt that the person writing the letter hated America, but judging from the reception we received from the Dutch and the tremendous cooperation between our two countries, it is clear that there is a mutual respect and trust between us. We do not agree on everything, but the country that was the first to salute the American flag following the Revolutionary War was also one of the first to assist us in our war on terrorism and the threat posed by Iraq.

## DAY SEVEN

### Spain

*Thursday, July 31*

In the morning we leave the Netherlands for Spain. We begin our sessions by meeting with Spanish Parliamentarians. Again, the session features a cross-section of members representing both the ruling and opposition parties. The Speaker opens the meeting noting that, as Speaker of the House, he spends most of his time listening. Spanish Vice

President Margarita Mariscal discusses the intense debate in the Spanish Parliament regarding the war in Iraq. They all speak in the context of history, which is not uncommon during this trip.

One person says that when we were attacked on Sept. 11, 2001, Spain truly knew the enemy America faced. The country's own history of terrorism enabled it to relate to America's circumstances, knowing how alone a people can feel at such a time. Another person mentions that, although he had studied in the United States and brought his children to Normandy to witness the true cost of freedom, he believes that other solutions could have been found in regards to the war in Iraq.

Someone else says that with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the world ignored the growth of other monsters. All freedom-loving democracies share the common enemies of totalitarianism, organized crime and terrorism, among others. These enemies demand that we confront them as allies, not as rivals, in this new world picture in which old risks and threats to democracy now bear a new face and intensity. During the Reagan years, we knew how to face the threats, but now we have been drawn into a non-conventional war with non-conventional weapons, a war waged by weakened tyrants bent on attacking the West or Israel. Our meeting concludes with the understanding that transatlantic relations are best based upon shared values, transparency and a balanced relationship.

A strong sense of shared values and understanding is apparent in all of the meetings that we hold in Spain. The threat of terrorism is real; we need to stand united through tough times and disagreements; and this will define whether we live in freedom or the law of terror.

As a side note, the newspapers this morning discuss John M. Poindexter's plan to launch a system that allows people to profit from predictions of terrorist attacks. What a dumb idea, and what great news when it is later announced that he will leave the Pentagon. He should have left a long time ago.

We later meet with Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar. He discusses the need to view terrorism in a broad sense in order to defeat it. Spain's experience demonstrates that terrorists will exploit any opening that they uncover; that decisions in confronting terrorist threats over the past few months are consistent with 200 years of history; that we should work together, not build a competitive structure in Europe to counterbalance the United States; and that we should visit Europe often to develop personal relationships and discuss common issues.

Prior to the trip, Speaker Hastert invited Prime Minister Aznar to address a joint session of Congress, similar to British Prime Minister Tony Blair's speech in July. He re-extends the offer during our meeting. The Speaker also addresses the issue of genetically modified organisms and drug trafficking. The Prime Minister clearly understands leadership and he is doing what he believes is right despite sometimes overwhelming public opposition. Polls showed that more than 90 percent of the Spanish public opposed involvement in Iraq. However, in recent elections the Prime Minister's Popular Party

finished very well in the polls. It appears that Spaniards reward real leadership, although they might disagree with the Prime Minister at times.

Tonight we build on discussions held earlier in the day at dinner with Spanish Ambassador George L. Argyros, Sr. Dinners in Spain are served late. Restaurants do not open until 8 p.m. and dinner does not conclude until midnight at the earliest.

## DAY EIGHT

*Friday, Aug. 1*

We begin today by meeting with Spanish Foreign Minister Ana Palacio – another impressive individual. She has formed a great friendship with U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, and they remain in regular contact. She reinforces and reiterates many points illustrated earlier by other Spanish officials. She discusses the many faces of terrorism, including the fact that some terrorists have evolved into narco-terrorists. This is now occurring in many areas of Afghanistan where we created an opening and they now produce a large poppy crop that will eventually flood the European market.

The Foreign Minister traveled to Iraq last week and reports that the situation is improving but that final solutions will require time. Banks are open, women are shopping, traffic is heavy, and children are taking examinations. Life is becoming easier, but not easy.

She and others were frustrated by the popular view that European countries opposed military efforts in Iraq. She stresses that many countries, including Spain, stood with us. She also highlights that we should build a transatlantic union, not build competing structures. Europe overcame divisions during World War II, and we can also emerge from this stronger than before.

We move on to the embassy for more meetings and a visit with Ambassador Argyros. We spend some more time in Madrid before moving on to Granada.

## DAY NINE

*Saturday, Aug. 2*

We meet with the Mayor of Granada. It is only a courtesy call, but Prime Minister Aznar personally requested that he provide us with a good reception. We leave the Mayor for a tour of Al-Humbra Palace, an amazing structure built by the Moors. The region holds so much importance to Muslim history that Osama bin Laden has mentioned southern Spain as a region that the Muslim world should reclaim. For many years this area featured Catholics, Jews and Muslims living together peacefully, but in 1492 Ferdinand and Isabella expelled Muslims and Jews from the region.



We end the night with a wonderful reception hosted by the Mayor that lasted late into the evening. We are not sure when we are expected to leave, but as we prepare to exit we realize that they still have deserts to distribute. We leave for the night without staying for desert, but it is clear they plan to continue the reception much longer.

## DAY TEN

*Sunday, Aug. 3*

We begin the trip home, but not before stopping at the U.S. Naval Station in Rota, a Spanish base with a significant U.S. presence of 6,000 active duty servicemen and their families. The cooperation is excellent, and I sense that we have much more freedom to operate than we do in Turkey. It is no wonder that we focus on allies like Spain as we plan into the future.

The base in Rota was instrumental to our efforts in Iraq. It served as a supply base during the war and a temporary hospital was installed that treated more than 1,400 casualties. It still serves as a key re-supply point.

We receive a tour of the base, eat lunch with the troops, meet with rapid deployment Marine security (currently 50 of whom are deployed to Liberia for embassy security), and receive a quick tour of a P-3 surveillance plane. Saying thank you to the troops for their service was a great last stop!

We will land at Andrews Air Force Base in about four hours, and then Erin (my daughter who interned in Washington this summer) will drive with me back to Michigan. Nine hours on the plane and 12 hours in the car – what a great job, and I really mean it.

## Summary

The trip proved to be everything I had expected and more, and we accomplished our key objectives:

- Expressing our thanks to our allies in the war on terrorism.
- Talking about our joint worldview for rebuilding Iraq and fighting the war on terrorism.
- Discussing our parochial issues.
- Building personal relationships with our counterparts in European parliaments.
- Better understanding the cultures and history of Europe. (The United States is such a young country.)

- Gaining a better understanding of our intelligence capabilities in other parts of the world.

Key lessons learned:

- The war on terrorism can and should unite us with our European allies.
- All of our countries face the difficult task of convincing a skeptical public what a war on terrorism really means and why military action in Iraq was necessary.
- We have many friends and strong relationships in Europe, although some relationships have been strained and need to be mended.
- Understanding a country's history and culture is a key component to building a strong relationship.
- The United States needs to continue to engage in international dialogue if we are to remain an effective world leader.

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