



Serbs in Congress: SUC Members visit the U.S. Congress

By Jasmina Vujic

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Having in mind the importance of our grass-root efforts and recent successes, the SUC planned the visit of its members to the U.S. Congress as a part of the 14th Annual Convention in Washington. The list of congressmen was prepared as well as the materials for them, including: the SUC "Mission with Vision" information brochure, our letter to the President Bush and Senator Kerry about Serbs in this country, information about the Serbian American constituency and their possible role in the November elections, the list of congressmen that supported H.RES 596, the list of congressmen that joined the Congressional Serbian Caucus, and the publication "Kosovo and Metohija: The March Pogrom, March 17-19, 2004 – with a survey of destroyed and endangered Christian cultural heritage". Prota Dusan Bunjevic donated about 20 copies of this publication for this purpose.

Together with the SUC members (mostly from California), our guests from Belgrade (Veselin Sjekloca), Austria (Olga Danilovic), and journalist from Belgrade (Radivoje Petrovic) also visited the U.S. Congress. Our group included: Prota Dusan Bunjevic and Protinica Ljiljana Bunjevic (Congressman Tom Lantos, D, CA-12), Ron and Mickey Radakovich (Congresswomen Ellen Tauscher, D, CA-10), Nena and Sava Price and Jelena Vukicevic (Congresswoman Anna Eshoo, D, CA-14), Jelena McWilliams (Congressman Tom Lantos D, CA-12), Rasa Bozinovic (Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren, D, CA-16), Ljiljana and Ratiboe Pantovic (Congressman Darrel Issa, R, CA-49), and Jasmina Vujic (Congresswomen Barbara Lee, D, CA-9). In addition, our group visited Congressman Dennis Kucinich (D, OH-10), Congressman Ron Paul (R, TX-14), and Congressman Mike Honda (D, CA-15).

Our discussions with the congressional staffers were focused on the situation in Kosovo, support for H.RES 596 and the Congressional Serbian Caucus. We thanked to those congressmen that supported H.RES 596 and/or joined the Serbian Caucus, and invited the others to support H.RES 596 and join the Serbian Caucus. We were welcomed in all offices, but particularly warm welcome was in the office of Congressman Dennis Kucinich, Congresswoman Barbara Lee, and Congressman Darrell Issa. Samantha Spinney, Legislative Assistant of Congressman Dennis Kucinich, informed us that he officially joined the Serbian Caucus.

The situation was very different when we visited the office of Congressman Tom Lantos, where we were clearly not welcomed. We expressed our disagreement with anti-Serb position of Congressman Tom Lantos, and asked that he leaves the Serbian Caucus. Prota Dusan Bunjevic protested that he did not receive any response from Congressman Tom Lantos, although a letter with 25 signatures from the members of Congressman Lantos constituency was sent to Congressman requesting a meeting.

Among the others, we talked to Mark Odom, Deputy Legislative Director of Congresswomen Barbara Lee; Samantha Spinney, Legislative Assistant of Congressman Dennis Kucinich; Tim Carey, Legislative Assistant of Congresswoman Anna Eshoo; Candice K. Bryan - Congressman

Tom Lantos; and Daniel McAdams, Senior Legislative Assistant for Foreign Affairs and Defense of Congressman Ron Paul.

The visit of the SUC members to the Congressional Offices in Washington has clearly shown that it is important to inform our representatives about the issues that are crucial to us, but that they might not know very much about. Whenever we put an effort to visit our representative and inform them about our concerns regarding Kosovo and Metohija, return of refugees, human right for the Serb and other non-Albanian minorities in Kosovo, security for minorities and accountability of officials in Kosovo, we got excellent response from our representative. This type of action should be continued and intensified in the future.



The SUC members and their guests visiting the Congresswoman Barbara Lee Office in Washington. From left, standing: Jelena Vukicevic, Olga Danilovic, Veselin Sjekloca, Jasmina Vujic, Mark Odom, Prota Dusan Bunjevic, Ljiljana Pantovic, Nena Price; from left, sitting: Jelena McWilliams and Radivoje Petrovic.