

[H.Res. 536, Supporting freedom of the press in Latin America and the Caribbean and condemning violations of press freedom and violence against journalists, bloggers, and individuals exercising their right to freedom of speech](#)

**FLOOR SITUATION**

On Tuesday, December 15, 2015, the House will consider [H.Res. 536](#), a resolution supporting freedom of the press in Latin America and the Caribbean and condemning violations of press freedom and violence against journalists, bloggers, and individuals exercising their right to freedom of speech, under suspension of the rules. H.Res. 536 was introduced on November 19, 2015 by Rep. Albio Sires (D-NJ) and was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, which ordered the resolution reported, as amended, by unanimous consent, on December 9, 2015.

**SUMMARY**

H.Res. 536 resolves that the House of Representatives:

- Supports a free press in Latin America and the Caribbean and condemns violations of press freedom and violence against journalists;
- Urges countries in the region to implement recommendations from the Organization of American States' Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression to its Member States;
- Urges countries in Latin America and the Caribbean to be vocal in condemning violations of press freedom, violence against journalists, and the culture of impunity that leads to self-censorship;
- Urges countries in the Western Hemisphere to uphold the principles outlined in the Inter-American Democratic Charter and urges their neighbors in the region to stand by the charter to which they are a party; and,
- Urges the United States Agency for International Development and the Department of State to assist, when appropriate, the media in closed societies to promote an open and free press.

## BACKGROUND

On July 29, 2015, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere held a hearing entitled “[Threats to Press Freedom in the Americas](#).” The subcommittee heard testimony that only three of the countries in Latin America, or 15 percent, are rated as having a free media, while there is “a growing regional trend of government persecution and harassment of journalists, as well as an increase in violent attacks carried out by state and non-state actors with near-complete impunity.”<sup>1</sup>

The Subcommittee also heard that “despite the strong tradition of independent, investigative, and critical media in many countries of the region, journalists are increasingly vulnerable to both violence and government harassment.”<sup>2</sup> One witness testified that “more than 30 years after democratization in the region, transnational criminal networks have extended their sway and spread a wave of unprecedented violence across Latin America. Scores of journalists have been killed and disappeared. Media outlets have been bombed and forced into censorship. The consequences are devastating: many regional democracies have deteriorated due to political instability and weakened institutions.”<sup>3</sup>

According to its sponsor, the resolution “is an important tool to spread awareness about grave abuses against journalists and those seeking to express themselves freely in the Western Hemisphere. As the winds of change begin to sweep the region, it is now more important than ever for the United States to provide a voice to those democratic activists who seek nothing but a better future.”<sup>4</sup>

## COST

A Congressional Budget Office (CBO) cost estimate is currently unavailable.

## STAFF CONTACT

For questions or further information please contact [Jerry White](#) with the House Republican Policy Committee by email or at 5-0190.

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<sup>1</sup> See [Testimony](#) of Dr. Carlos E. Ponce before Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, July 29, 2015 at 2.

<sup>2</sup> See [Testimony](#) of Mr. Carlos Lauria before Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, July 29, 2015 at 1 and 2.

<sup>3</sup> Id.

<sup>4</sup> See Press Release—“[Sires Resolution Condemning Attacks on Press Freedoms in the Western Hemisphere Unanimously Passes in House Foreign Affairs Committee](#),” December 9, 2015.