

KAZAKHSTAN MAKING PROGRESS IN DEMOCRACY, FREE MARKETS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. GUTKNECHT). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. METCALF) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. METCALF. Mr. Speaker, I return this week from monitoring an election in Kazakhstan. The election to the lower house of Kazakhstan's parliament, the Majilis, has been described by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe as a "tentative step in the country's transition to democracy."

While the election was not perfect, the Kasakhs acknowledged this, it was an important step toward true representative self-government.

I have heard many negative comments towards the Kasakh government recently. Certainly the attempted transfer of MIG 21s to North Korea was a major security concern for the United States. However, the Kasakh government dealt with this matter swiftly, fired those responsible, and put in place mechanisms to prevent this from occurring again.

More importantly, we are not hearing the positive steps occurring in Kazakhstan. The Kasakh government is privatizing state assets, encouraging small business, and taking seriously the business of doing, of building real democratic institutions. Do not forget, voluntarily, Kazakhstan unilaterally disarmed its nuclear arsenal.

The United States needs to recognize that this secular nation, bordered by Russia on the north, China to the east, and several nations to the south and west that may export Islamic fundamentalism, really wants an economic and strategic relationship with us.

They understand that we want to see evolving liberal democratic institutions, free markets, and a real respect for human rights. We need to understand that Kazakhstan has only 7 years under its belt as an independent nation, and that they are taking important steps in these matters.

Let us look at Kazakhstan as an evolving partner, and let us reward their important steps in the fields of democracy, free markets, human rights with a stronger diplomatic and economic relationship. I invite my colleagues to visit this beautiful country and see for themselves the progress that is being made.

MEDICARE PAYMENTS AND THE STATE OF FLORIDA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida (Ms. BROWN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, today we kicked off Voices Against Violence, a congressional teen conference with a goal of involving young people

in a nationwide debate on ways for legislators and others to prevent youth violence, both nationally and in local schools and communities. More than 400 students from across the country will participate in the teen conference. I want to thank the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. GEPHARDT) for his leadership in making this conference possible.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to discuss an issue that is very important to the citizens of my State of Florida. The cuts in the Medicare and Medicaid payments to the health providers in my State are causing a crisis.

With Florida's large senior population, no other single payer impacts health care providers in the State more than Medicare. With almost 3 million Medicare beneficiaries, Florida has the second largest Medicare population in the United States. Almost one in every five Floridians qualify for Medicare, the highest percent of any State in the country. Unfortunately for those hard-working people, the cuts in Medicare funding in the Balanced Budget Act are preventing them from getting the care that they need and deserve.

Florida's home health agencies, skilled nursing facilities, medical equipment providers, Teaching and Disproportionate Share Hospitals are in a state of crisis. Especially in the rural areas, these organizations are being forced to bear an extreme financial burdens, causing them to stretch their budgets dangerously thin and forcing them to provide substandard care to their patients.

Every single day in my office I receive calls and letters from patients and their providers who tell me horror stories of people being sent home early from the hospital, having therapy cut off before they are properly healed, and being denied care altogether. This is not right.

I hear from my colleagues that we have a huge surplus that we need to give back to the people. This Congress can start giving it back to the people by providing adequate funding for the health care for our seniors who have already paid for it and so desperately need it.

I am glad to hear that my colleagues on the Committee on Ways and Means are moving forward on this issue, and I am looking forward to working with them to restore these dangerous cuts. Let us do the right thing and restore these massive cuts in Medicare reimbursement.

CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL TO BE AWARDED TO PRESIDENT AND MRS. FORD

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. EHLERS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. EHLERS. Mr. Speaker, just a short time ago, we passed a resolution allowing the use of the rotunda for a ceremony to grant a Congressional

Gold Medal to President and Mrs. Ford. I would like to give some background information on that award. I was very pleased to sponsor the bill that would grant them this medal because they have served this country so well for so many years.

What is unique about this medal, this particular medal, and what is different than any previous medal in history, is that it will be awarded to both President and Mrs. Ford. I believe it very important to recognize the part that both of them played in the history of our country.

Mrs. Ford contributed a great deal to the health of the women of this Nation by discussing very frankly and openly the fact that she had breast cancer. Now, that may seem rather mundane today, but at the time she developed breast cancer, she was the First Lady in the White House. Breast cancer was not discussed in polite society. It was whispered about. As a result, many women did not know what caused breast cancer. They did not know about self-examination. They did not know what treatments were available.

Mrs. Ford announced that she had this terrible disease. She described the symptoms to this Nation. She worked with the media to publicize the nature of breast cancer. She was very effective in alerting the women of this Nation to the need for breast examination and treatment.

In addition to that, later on in life, due to a number of pain medications that she was taking and the use of alcohol, Mrs. Ford recognized the need for treatment for alcoholism and drug dependency and started the Betty Ford Clinic. This has been a life-saving institution for many, many people. She still takes a personal interest in it, still visits with new patients as they come in, and has been very effective in helping many people recover from substance abuse or alcohol abuse.

President Ford, of course, is well known as the President who healed our Nation after the resignation from office of President Nixon. However, since we have almost a generation elapsed since President Ford held office, I find many people simply are not aware of what was happening at that time and the incredible turmoil that this Nation felt at the time that President Nixon was undergoing examination by the Congress, facing impeachment, and eventually resigning from office.

When President Ford took that office, he, in a very calm and deliberate manner, proceeded to heal this Nation. He restored order. He restored financial stability. He reduced interest rates. He improved the economy and showed that our government could survive a crisis like that and function well. For this, he deserves our thanks and our commendation.

Because of this and because of the actions of both President and Mrs. Ford, I thought it very deserving that they receive the Congressional Gold Medal. This will be presented to them next

week in the rotunda of the Capitol. I urge all Members to attend, and I urge also the citizens of this country to join me in applauding both Jerry and Betty Ford, President and Mrs. Ford, for their selfless service to this country for all the good that they have done for all of us.

VOICES AGAINST VIOLENCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE. Mr. Speaker, I too rise today with great pleasure to stand and welcome the many young people who have come to Washington, D.C. to participate in Voices Against Violence, a congressional teen conference sponsored by the office of the Democratic leader and the Democratic Caucus.

However, these young people come from all over the country, and many of them come from so many different walks of life and, might I say, from different political parties. This is a bipartisan summit. Young people have come from across the country to talk about the issues of youth violence and how it impacts their lives.

I am pleased to have four students here from my district in Houston, and I met them at the airport this afternoon as they arrived in Washington, D.C. As they communicated with me their desires, each of them said they came to listen, but they also came to provide solutions.

They want to see more opportunities for parents and schoolteachers and counselors to listen to students. They want to find ways to help students who are concerned or have problems and pressures not to explode like what happened in Columbine, but to have resources where they can talk. These young people mean business, and they have come to work.

Young people live in a different world than what existed about 20 years ago. In this new era, young people have all the advantages of a new technologically advanced society as well as a new landscape of social interaction. Theirs is a future full of promise, and we are poised on a dawning of a new century that will bring even more.

However, in light of these changing times, we also have a society that seems to be more detached, more chaotic, more violent. We have seen a significant increase in violence against young people and violence committed by young people. These young people want the violence to stop.

There are many competing theories as to the causes of youth violence, from the increase in violence in popular culture to the lack of prayer in schools. Others will even say that the increase of youth crimes is the symptom of a larger breakdown of our society. But I believe these young people will be instructive as they come to Washington.

I welcome Jessica Abad from Booker T. Washington High School, Eric Del Toro from Barbara Jordan High School, Andrea Marie Garrity from Reagan High School, and Ashley Robinson from Jesse H. Jones High School, along with Dr. Alma Allen, the chaperrone, a member of the Texas Board of Education and school administrator from the HISD.

As I close, Mr. Speaker, let me congratulate the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. GEPHARDT), the Democratic leader, and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. FROST), the caucus leader, for helping to sponsor this conference.

I said, Mr. Speaker, that we started out with a sense of hope for these young people coming here. I am disappointed, however, as I speak about another issue, that as the Commerce, State, Justice appropriation bill comes to the floor of the House, the conferees have decided or rejected the idea of adding to it the Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 1999. What a travesty inasmuch as the Senate bill did have this legislation.

In the light of the tragedies that have occurred in Illinois, in light of the tragedies that occurred in my own State of Texas with James Byrd being dismembered by hateful acts, those who promoted racist provocations and acts, along with the activities of the killing of Matthew Shepard, but many, many others, these are just examples of hateful acts in America.

For those who would say that other crimes are equal to hateful acts, that any murder is hateful, they are absolutely wrong. I wish they would understand what the hate stands for. It stands for the intimidation of large groups of people.

When James Byrd was killed and dismembered, it was not intended just to say something to James Byrd. It was intended to tell African Americans that they do not stand equal in this country, that they can be dismembered in this brutal manner. When Matthew Shepard was killed, it was intended to show gays and lesbians that they are not equal in this Nation.

Hate crimes intimidate groups. When is this Congress going to understand that, in order to make a national statement about who we are as Americans as we go into the 21st century, we need a national position as we did with the Voter Rights Act in 1965 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, that we stand against hate crimes?

It is a travesty and a shame that this appropriations bill would not have the inclusion of the Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 1999 similar to what the other body did. We are going to fight it, and we are going to prevail because good people in America will prevail over evil.

Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I stand tonight to welcome the many young people who have come to Washington, DC, to participate in "Voices Against Violence," a congressional teen conference sponsored by the Office of the Democrat Leader and the Democratic Caucus.

Young people have come from across the country to talk about the issue of youth violence and its effect on their lives. I am pleased to have four students here from my district in Houston.

Young people live in a different world than what existed just 20 years ago. In this new era, young people have all the advantages of a new technologically advanced society as well as a new landscape of social interaction. Theirs is a future full of promise and we are poised on the dawning of a new century that will bring even more.

However, in light of these changing times, we also have a society that seems to be more detached, more chaotic and more violent. We have seen a significant increase in violence against young people and violence committed by young people.

There are many competing theories as to the causes of youth violence, from the increase in violence in popular culture to the lack of prayer in public schools. Others would even say that the increase of youth crime is a symptom of a larger breakdown in the moral fabric of society.

By now, we know that the problem of youth violence cannot be traced to a single cause or source. At the same time, we here in Congress have formed various working groups and task forces to address this issue, because we are all searching for some answers and solutions to youth violence.

It is now appropriate that we have now turned our attention to our children, and to take the time to hear from them. Not all of our young people are caught up in the cycle of violence. We know that 95% of all young people are good kids who want to do the right thing. Too often, we focus on the bad elements and overlook these children.

This conference gives us an opportunity to make up for our neglect of this 95%. The purpose of this conference is to go beyond pointing fingers at the various causes of youth violence, and to discuss tangible solutions. The solutions that will be offered these next 2 days will come from our children.

It is refreshing to hear the perspective of young people on solutions to youth violence. Last month, during the Congressional Black Caucus Annual Legislative Conference, some young people participated in the Juvenile Justice forum I sponsored and shared some unique insights into the problem of youth violence.

I was enlightened by the views of these young people, especially the views of the young men who were very articulate and insightful about their experiences. One young man spoke eloquently of what he thought were the negative perceptions he faced as a young Black man.

This is the type of dialogue I hope the young people will engage in as they discuss solutions to youth violence. The close to 400 participants will get to discuss these issues with the President and other policy makers to help us understand their perspective on this problem.

I hope that these teens will come away from this conference with a new understanding of each other that they can take back to their communities.

I am pleased to have four students from my district in Houston here to participate in the conference—Jessica Abad from Booker T. Washington High School; Eric Del Toro from