

Senate and the administration, tax reform commission.

This commission is going to have a very simple task, which is to make recommendations to Congress for fundamental tax reform and simplification. The commission is modeled on the National Commission for Restructuring the IRS that I headed up with Senator BOB KERREY. I know commissions have a checkered past in this town, and it is easy to give problems to a commission and hope they go away, but some commissions do work. The IRS commission worked because it forced Congress to tackle that reform and to clean up the IRS.

That is the hope here in having a nonpartisan panel to look at this very complicated, very contentious issue, study the issue, bring some expertise to bear, and try to take the politics out of the process and lay the foundation here in Congress for some very needed and important changes to our Tax Code.

The commission will have 15 members, three appointed by the President, four each appointed by the Senate majority leader and the speaker, and two each appointed by the House and Senate minority leaders.

The important thing is most members in this commission will be from outside Congress, from outside the Federal bureaucracy. They will be members on the commission from around the country with expertise to bring to bear. There will be one Member from the House that will be a Republican and one Member from the House that will be a Democrat, same on the Senate, one Democrat, one Republican. But, again, most members will be people from the outside who can bring expertise in a nonpartisan approach to this important problem.

The commission will have a short timetable, 18 months, to complete its work and make a report to Congress, again on ways to fundamentally simplify and reform, fundamentally, reform the Tax Code. I would like to urge my colleagues listening tonight to support this effort and to vote for that legislation next week that is so important to move us from our current broken system to one that meets all our needs better.

The tax season is a frustrating time of year for so many Americans. Many of us are doing our taxes now. The amount of taxes we have to pay, the complexity and basic unfairness of the Tax Code, makes a lot of us wonder if there is not a better way. There has got to be a better way. And Congress has heard those concerns. We are committed to changing the status quo. Let us start with meaningful tax relief and simplification where we can this year, but let us go beyond, let us also lay the foundation for the kind of long-term reforms that will give all Americans a fairer, a simpler, and a less intrusive Tax Code.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to yield back my time, with the under-

standing that my friend, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. ENGLISH), a distinguished member of the Committee on Ways and Means, along with my friend, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LINDER), another distinguished member of the Congress who has a lot of expertise on tax issues, will have a chance to continue this dialogue.

CONTINUED DIALOGUE ON TAX RELIEF AND TAX REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. THUNE). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. ENGLISH) is recognized for the balance of the 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. ENGLISH. Mr. Speaker, after concluding opening remarks, I will be yielding to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LINDER) who has some very interesting ideas to outline for us.

Mr. Speaker, I was struck by the tenor of my colleague's comments, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. PORTMAN), who laid out a bill of particulars of what this Congress has done to make this Tax Code much more pro working family. But at the same time, we need to recognize that more needs to be done, and it is time for Congress to move in the direction of fundamental structural tax reform.

Next week, as the gentleman from Ohio noted, the House Committee on Ways and Means will be sponsoring a tax reform summit where many of the ideas of alternatives to the current tax system will be outlined. I have one that I intend to outline tonight, but let me say that the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LINDER), myself, and the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. PORTMAN) share a common perspective which I believe is why we feel we need to move forward quickly on this subject and begin to define alternatives to the current tax system.

The American tax system looms like a Frankenstein's monster that terrorizes individual taxpayers while casting a cold shadow over the productive sectors of the U.S. economy. It is too complicated and riddled with obvious inequities, it punishes savings and investment, it reduces economic growth, and it burdens domestic industries struggling to remain competitive.

We in Congress cannot complacently sit back and watch as this complicated, antiquated tax system erodes our Nation's confidence in its economy. We must reform the American tax system in a way that makes sense to average citizens and that, therefore, will pass the test of time. Because not only do we need a fair and sensible Tax Code, we need a stable one.

As bad as the current Tax Code is, and I am one of its severest critics, in my view the last thing we need to enact is some reform that is so radical and experimental that it results in an irresistible demand to redo it again a few years later. The simplified USA

Tax Act that I have introduced does all of that and more. H.R. 134 is based on sound and familiar principles that we all understand and we know will work.

The Tax Code, Mr. Speaker, must give Americans a fair opportunity to save part of their earnings. After all, thrift has helped provide Americans the security and independence that is the foundation of freedom. We understand that savings is the seed corn of the modern economy. Savings buys the tools to make Americans more productive. Productivity raises our living standards to the highest in the world.

In my tax reform proposal, USA stands for unlimited savings allowance. Everyone is allowed an unlimited Roth IRA in which they can put the portion of each year's income they save after paying taxes and living expenses. After 5 years, all money in the account could be withdrawn for any purpose, and all withdrawals, including accumulated interest and other earnings and principal, are tax free. Nothing can be simpler and nothing could give the people a better opportunity to save, especially young people. Because only new income earned after enactment of the simplified USA tax can be put into the USA Roth IRA, young people starting to move into their higher earning years are the ones who will benefit the most in the long run.

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The Tax Code must also give everyone the opportunity to keep what they save and, if they wish, to pass it along to succeeding generations.

To that end, my tax reform proposal repeals the Federal death tax. Under the new Tax Code, tax rates must be low, especially for wage earners who now must pay an income tax and a 7.65 percent FICA payroll tax on the same amount of wages. The simplified USA tax starts out with low tax rates, 15 percent at the bottom, 25 percent in the middle, and 30 percent at the top.

Then the rates are reduced even further by allowing wage earners a full tax credit for the 7.65 percent Social Security and Medicare payroll tax that is withheld from their paychecks under current law.

Mr. Speaker, I do not propose to repeal the payroll tax, because to do so would imperil Social Security. But I do allow a credit for it; and when the credit is taken into account, the rates of tax on workers wages are very low, indeed, in the 7 percent to 17 percent range, for nearly all Americans.

The simplified USA tax provides tax relief for all Americans, especially those who own their home, give to their church, educate their children, and set aside some money for a better tomorrow.

Under my proposal, everyone receives a deduction for the mortgage interest on their home and for charitable contributions that they choose to make. In addition, USA tax allows a deduction for tuition paid for college and postsecondary vocational education.

This type of incentive is relatively new, and given the importance of education, long overdue to encourage investment in human capital. Generous personal and family exemptions are also allowed under my proposal. On a joint return, the family exemption is \$8,140; and there is an additional 2,700 exemption for each member of the family. Thus a married couple with two children pays no tax on their first \$18,940 of income.

The simplified USA tax is just that, simple, 75 percent simpler than the current Tax Code by one estimate. The tax return will be short, only a page or two for most of us; but more to the point, the tax return will be understandable.

For the first time in many years, America's tax system will make sense to the citizens who file the tax returns and pay the taxes. And for the first time since inception of the Federal income tax, Americans will have a full and fair opportunity to save whatever proportion of their income they wish and for whatever purpose they wish.

Working families will be allowed a credit for the payroll tax they pay. Families will have generous taxfree allowance for the education of their children. My proposal, Mr. Speaker, also contains a new and better way of taxing corporations and other businesses and this is something that every worker in the international economy has stake in. It allows them to compete and win in global markets in a way that exports American-made products, not American jobs.

Experts who have studied my plan believe that if enacted in America, this innovative approach to business taxation will soon become the worldwide standard to which other countries aspire. All businesses, corporate and non-corporate, are taxed alike under my plan at an 8 percent rate on the first \$150,000 of profit and at 12 percent on all amounts above that, small business level.

All businesses will be allowed a credit for the payroll tax they pay under current law. All costs for plant, equipment, and inventory in the United States will be expensed into the year of purchase. This is a critical reform that will allow capital formation in those businesses competing in the international economy that most need it.

This is an important point, Mr. Speaker. All export sales income is exempt, as is all other foreign source income. All profits earned abroad can be brought back home for reinvestment in America without penalty. Because of a 12 percent import adjustment, all companies that produce abroad and sell back in the U.S. markets will be required to bear the same tax as companies that both produce and sell in the U.S.

Mr. Speaker, I hope to push forward a bipartisan effort with the simplified version of the USA tax. I invite all of my colleagues in the House to join me in an effort to provide the American

people the fair and sensible tax system they deserve.

Mr. Speaker, for too long the Tax Code has been a terrible drag on our economy that is not very smart and certainly is not fair to those Americans whose living standards are lower now because of it. For years, its complex inanities have been the object of ridicule. It is also the ultimate source of bureaucratic excesses and abuse by the IRS that is inconsistent with our free society.

In my view, it is high time we restore people's faith in the integrity and basic fairness of their tax system and in the process, take a major step toward restoring people's confidence in the good character of their government.

Mr. Speaker, we believe that these are priorities worth pursuing, and I believe that this plan is one that can push us in the right direction.

To hear about another plan, the fair tax plan, I would like to yield such time as he may consume to the prime sponsor of that bill, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LINDER), who we expect will outline a challenging alternative to the proposal I have just laid before us.

Mr. LINDER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. ENGLISH) for yielding, and I thank the gentleman from Erie for his plan and the gentleman from Cincinnati (Mr. PORTMAN) for arranging a special order.

Let me say, Mr. Speaker, before I get into my plan, that any one of these proposals is better than the current system. What we have learned after 86 years of the current system, if we had sat down at the beginning in 1913 and said how can we build a tax system that will punish people for working hard and earning, that will be obstructive of capital formation, we could not have done a better job than we have done here.

Our tax system is the single biggest impediment to people reaching from the first rung of the economic ladder to the second, because the harder you work, the more you save, the more you invest, the more we take. It is a system that is inefficient. We have seen testimony from the Kemp Commission to Harvard studies that say for a small businessman or woman to comply with the code, collect and remit \$1 in business income taxes, it costs them anywhere from \$4 to \$7 to do that.

It is un-understandable. Our own IRS tells us that if you call the IRS for help filling out your own tax return for an answer to a question, 25 percent of the answers they give you are in error. Money Magazine sent the same data to 49 different tax preparers for a hypothetical family and found 49 different tax returns varying by thousands of dollars.

We should get away from the notion of taxing what people put into society, their productivity, their job creation, their work, and tax what they take out of it, their consumption.

When you think about it, there is no way for a business in America to pay a

tax. There is not a mechanism for it. If you have a business, and I have had several, there is not a secret drawer where the money piles up, where you find your share of the payroll tax.

There is not another secret drawer where the money piles up, where you pay your income tax from.

It all comes out of price, as well as your electric bill and labor cost, but it is all in price. If you have a loaf of bread, a farmer has touched it, a trucking company, a processing company, a bakery, a distribution company, a retail outlet, not to mention the cardboard manufacturers and the plastics people. All of them have tax costs, payroll tax costs, income tax costs, accountants and attorneys to avoid the tax codes. All of that gets put into the price of that loaf of bread.

And we think, from the study we have done at Harvard, that it is 22 percent. On average what you pay at retail is 22 percent inflated by the embedded cost to the IRS. How do you fix that? You get rid of the IRS. Get rid of the income tax on both corporate and individuals, get rid of the payroll tax which is the largest tax that three-fourths of America pays. Three-fourths of us pay more for Social Security and Medicare than we do in income taxes.

Get rid of the death tax, the capital gains tax, the tax on dividends, the gift tax; and replace it with a one-time retail sales tax. If you spend \$100, the first \$23 goes to Uncle Sam, the rest goes to the merchant. Currently, \$22 is going to the embedded costs to the IRS.

Our numbers show that as of 1995 that we are bringing the same amount of money as the current system. Now, what will this do in the world? You will have a percent higher cost of living, but you get to keep your whole check. If you are an average income earner in America at 28 percent withholding level, 28 percent income tax withholding and 7.65 percent is your share of the payroll tax costs, your employer pays an equal amount for you, you will have a 56 percent increase in take-home pay the next day. You can afford the penny.

What happens in the world? If we are the only Nation in the world selling into the global economy with no tax component in our prices are we going to be more competitive? If a corporation finds more value in equity than debt, today there is more value in debt, because if you borrow money, you get to deduct the entire interest costs.

If you have equity, shareholders, you pay tax on the profits; and when you give it to them as dividends, they pay tax one more time. And if they sell stuff, they pay tax on the capital gain. Under our system, with no taxes on business, no taxes on investment, there would be fewer people in the borrowing markets and the interest rates will go down 25 percent across the board for school loans, homes, cars.

If you are at an international corporation like Coca-Cola from my hometown with sales across the globe and

dollars stranded overseas because it is cheaper to borrow here at 8 percent than to repatriate those dollars at 35 percent. All of those dollars come home. The plant gets built in this country, foreign companies find it attractive to build a plant in this country, because there is no tax consequences.

Every investor in the world will be in on our stock markets because there is no tax consequence. The markets go up. Who is opposed to this? Not CPAs. You think CPAs like this system? They are at risk every time they sign a tax return.

We have not even promulgated the rule for some of the tax changes that we have. CPAs can make far more money planning the future for their clients, the growth of the business, the financing of that growth, than they can recording the past. This town does not like the bill. It will be the largest transfer of power from Washington to individuals in the history of our government. We know too much about you. We would give that away.

There are 100,000 people at the IRS that know more about me than I am willing to tell my children, and I want them out of my life and yours. These are not bad people. These are people doing the job that this Congress by statute has directed them to do, but we should not have any agency of government that knows how you make money or how much you make or how you spend it. That should be none of our business.

Unlike the simple tax return that you heard from my friend from Erie talk about, my tax return is nonexistent. You never, ever keep a receipt or a record or file a tax return. Now, people will say this is hurtful on the poor, because they spend all of their money for living, to which my response is this: they are already paying a 22 percent cost to the IRS in everything they buy.

We are going to get rid of that. But beyond that, we do not believe anybody should pay tax on necessities. Every year the Department of Health and Human Services says that a household of one needs to spend, last year it was \$8,500, with my tax included, to pay for their necessities. My mother in an apartment in Minnesota can pay for her health care, housing, food, clothing for \$8,500 dollars, that is called poverty living; but that is what HHS says you can get by in your necessities. My daughter and my son-in-law and three grandsons in Memphis need to spend \$25,000 for their necessities.

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Our rebate will totally return to them on a monthly basis the total tax consequences of spending up to the poverty line. So no family, rich or poor, has to pay taxes on their necessities. Beyond that, we are all discretionary spenders. We should all pay the same. Just imagine a world in which you are a voluntary taxpayer. We do

not have to pass bills like we have done and the gentleman from Erie, we worked on a bill to make the IRS more friendly because it was a huge adversarial relationship with our taxpayers. We do not need that because you are going to be a voluntary taxpayer. You are going to pay taxes exactly when you choose to pay them and exactly as much as you choose to pay them. If you want to buy a used house instead of a new one or a used car instead of a new one, no taxes. Only new things for personal consumption, personal use. Because we believe that a house already has a 30 percent embedded cost of the IRS in it and you should only pay taxes on anything one time.

I want you to have the privilege in a free society of being anonymous again. We should not know as much about you as we do. We should not have anybody who can look into your records and know your history. I think the privilege of anonymity is the single greatest gift a free society can give its citizens.

Let me further say this: We have built a tax system that every time the government wants more of your money, we promise you it is only going to increase the taxes on the top 1 percent. Remember 1990? Do you remember 1993? It is only going to increase the taxes on the top 1 percent. So 99 percent say, Go get them. Fine with me. It's not going to hurt me.

Guess what? We all pay. In 1990, when President Bush agreed to a tax increase on the top 1 percent, the top 1 percent paid \$106 billion in taxes. In 1991 after the tax was increased, they paid \$100 billion in taxes.

Guess what? Rich people are often smart people and they find ways to change the way they get their income. They can control it and reduce their obligation. I do not blame them. I want the next tax increase to be so important that we all pay, including my mother on that loaf of bread. We all ought to be involved in this.

Russell Long when he was chairman of the Senate Finance Committee had a wonderful saying. He said, "Don't tax him and don't tax me but tax that man behind the tree." And we are all willing to do that. But what we find out is it comes back through the system and we all pay at the checkout line at retail.

So let us be honest about it. Let us have a transparent, frank, obvious tax at retail that we all know how much our government is costing us and we all pay equally. This bill totally untaxes the poor. It untaxes necessities, and it treats everybody else exactly the same. It gives us a world in which investment is attractive, consumption is not. It gives us a world where we are all treated equally.

I want to remind you what was said in 1913 when they passed the 16th amendment to allow the income tax. A Senator was ridiculed so bad that he was laughed off the floor of the Senate for saying something that was absolutely outrageous to the rest of the

Senators. He said this: "Mark my words, before this is over, the government is going to be taking 10 percent of everything we earn." Oh, how I wish it were so. That gave fresh meaning to my favorite country and western song: "If 10 Percent's Enough for Jesus, It Ought to Be Enough for Uncle Sam."

Mr. ENGLISH. I thank the gentleman, and I appreciate his contribution to this debate. He has laid out for us the vista of a very different tax system and one that I believe would potentially have a great impact on the American economy. One of the areas of similarity between his plan and my plan, I note, is the fact that he on the business side offers a border adjustable tax.

Before I slip into the jargon, what I mean by that is we would take the taxes off of exports and put a fair tax on imports. Now, I have been very concerned, Mr. Speaker, about our trade balance in this country. I have been very concerned about the competitiveness of American jobs. I have been very involved in working with the steel industry to address the problem of steel imports.

One of the proposals that always does not seem to get a full focus when we discuss these things is the fact that by changing our tax system, we could improve the competitive position of our economy and potentially the balance of trade. The tax system that the gentleman just outlined would not tax job creation in basic industry and it would allow us to export tax free.

My tax system has many of the same incentives and would allow us to grow capital intensive jobs. I look forward to hearing more about the gentleman's tax system next week when we discuss it in the House Committee on Ways and Means as part of our tax summit. I am also looking forward to the opportunity to discuss with colleagues on both sides of the aisle in our committee the merits of my tax proposal which I conceive to be a hybrid between a simplified income tax and a consumption tax. It has many of the same incentives of a consumption tax and yet addresses many of the equity issues that I believe concern Americans and concern their elected representatives.

I am hopeful that we can attract bipartisan support for real tax reform. In the interim, I am pleased that Republicans have chosen to move forward and to raise this issue and consider how we can simplify the tax code to the benefit of individual taxpayers and certainly to the benefit of the economy.

One parting shot. It really frightens me when I see estimates that suggest that the cost of the current tax system to our economy is somewhere upward of \$300 billion annually. That is a dead loss to our economy. It comes through complexity, it comes through the cost of the system itself, it comes through bad decisions that people make because

of the tax code and its perverse incentives. We need to change the tax system if we are going to leave this century the way we have entered it with the most productive economy and the preeminent economy in the world.

A FUTURE OF HOPE FOR TURKEY: ONE OF PEACE AND JUSTICE FOR THE KURDS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. THUNE). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, yesterday I introduced a resolution, House Resolution 461, to ask for the freedom of Leyla Zana, Hatip Dicle, Orhan Dogan and Selim Sadak as well as the lifting of the ban on the Kurdish language and culture in Turkey. Now, these names may be unfamiliar to some, but the names I just read are those of Kurdish parliamentarians, Kurdish Congress members who have been in prison, yes, Mr. Speaker, in prison as Congresspeople for the last 6 years. The language and culture that they represent are the Kurds, an indigenous people of the Middle East who live in an ancient land called Kurdistan. These representatives are in prison solely because they are Kurds, and the Kurds are not free because their land is ruled by Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Iraq.

Now, this body has previously heard of the name Leyla Zana who, according to *The New York Times*, is the most famous Kurdish dissident in the world. This country has heard of the Kurds because Saddam Hussein gassed them with his chemical and biological weapons in 1988 and threatened to do so again in 1991. But neither this country nor this body has really paid any attention to the plight of the Kurds living as they still do on their ancient lands and still persecuted now even as I speak by the governments in Ankara, Damascus, Tehran, and Baghdad.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to restrict my commentary today to Turkey, because it is a country we honor as an ally, we support as a friend and we favor as a partner. Turkey boasts of having a sophisticated U.S. arsenal in its inventory: M-16 machine guns, M-60 battle tanks, Cobra attack helicopters, and F-16 fighter planes. American Special Forces in fact train Turkish commandoes in Turkey. Turkish leaders are fond of referring to their people as an "army nation" and talks are now under way to supply Turkey with an additional 145 attack helicopters worth \$4 billion.

Now, is Turkey really worthy of these investments? Have our fighter planes, our attack helicopters, our battle tanks, and our machine guns protected the liberty of its citizens? Why are we training Turkish commandoes who are known to behead their victims and haul their dead bodies behind armored vehicles? In Turkey today, Mr.

Speaker, I note with trepidation that liberty is under assault. Cultural genocide is the law of the land. A way of life known as Kurdish is disappearing at an alarming rate.

Mr. Speaker, we are not always as a country indifferent to the plight of the Kurds. Our 28th President, Woodrow Wilson, supported the right of subject peoples to self-determination. In an address to the Senate on January 22, 1917 he said:

No nation should seek to extend its policy over any other nation or people but that every people should be left free to determine its own polity, its own way of development, unhindered, unthreatened, unafraid, the little along with the great and powerful.

Three months after this statement, the United States entered the war on the side of the Allies. The war cry "making the world safe for democracy" resonated with subject peoples all over the world and families from North Africa to Central Europe and people who named their sons after our President. But the prophetic words of President Wilson were disregarded, especially in the Ottoman provinces. The Armenians were massacred and the Kurds were subdued after the emergence of the Turkish republic. What followed has been chronicled as nothing other than a slow-motion genocide.

In Turkey, a people known to historians as the Kurds and a land known to geographers as Kurdistan simply disappeared from the official discourse overnight just 1 year after the inception of the young Turkish republic. The Kurds, said the Turkish officials, were not really Kurds but mountain Turks and their land was not really Kurdistan but eastern Turkey. This act of social engineering and historical revisionism has been propagated as the law of the land ever since. Thousands of Kurds have died in rebellion after rebellion. Millions have been uprooted. Some wish to raise a Rest in Peace sign over the entire Kurdish nation.

Perhaps of all the stories that have come out of the Kurdish land administered by the Turks, that of Layla Zana captures the essence of what it means to be a Kurd in Turkey. She was born in 1961 in a small Kurdish village near Farqin. Her earliest recollections of the Turks were either as tax collectors or as soldiers. In elementary school the lone Turkish teacher that she had told her she should learn Turkish because it was the language of the civilization. She was able to go to school for only 3 years. Then she worked on a farm, helped out in the house and occasionally heard of the name Mehdi Zana, who was her future husband, as the rising star of Kurdish politics.

In fact in 1976, she married Mehdi Zana and moved to the largest Kurdish city in the world known as Amed, or Diyarbakir, in northern Kurdistan. In 1977, Mehdi Zana was elected to the post of mayor of the city. Turkish officials were appalled. Here was an ardent Turkish nationalist who managed to earn the trust of his fellow Kurds. The

city Amed was put under siege. Its funds were frozen. Mayor Zana appealed to his European colleagues for help. French mayors responded by giving 30 buses and trucks filled with office supplies and for a short while the bus fares in the city were simply abolished. Leyla Zana's education in politics began in those tumultuous years.

On September 12, 1980, a general in the Turkish army named Kenan Evren declared himself the supreme leader of the country. He deposed the elected government and dissolved the parliament. His soldiers then began arresting dissidents, especially the Kurds. The rising star of Kurdish politics, Mehdi Zana, was high on their list. Twelve days later, he was arrested without any charges being posted. And for the next 8 years, he would be tortured in the infamous Diyarbakir military prison. He would witness the death of 57 of his friends. But through it all he did not break, he endured as did his wife and small children.

Mehdi Zana was kept in prison for 3 additional years in various Turkish prisons in Turkey proper. He has chronicled his ordeals in a book entitled *Prison No. 5*, now available in bookstores in this country as well as on amazon.com. I had the fortune of meeting this nonviolent champion of Kurdish rights a couple of years ago and was humbled by the generosity of his feelings toward his tormentors. Like President Nelson Mandela in South Africa, Mehdi Zana does not seek revenge. He wants peace for himself and his family and his people.

□ 1745

In words that still haunt me, he urged me to speak out against the slow motion genocide against the Kurds. "The Armenians," he noted, "were massacred. The Kurds are being put to permanent sleep."

Mr. Speaker, Leyla Zana's schooling consisted of adversity, torture, humiliation, and State-sanctioned persecution that has never slackened to this day. She had given birth to a son when Mehdi was the Mayor of Amed and would later give birth to a daughter after her husband's arrest. She would learn Turkish the hard way, from the police who harassed her for being the wife of a popular mayor, and the courts who ruled that he was a trader and deserved to die.

In 1998, she herself was thrown into jail and endured abuse, humiliation, and torture for organizing the wives of Kurdish political prisoners to demand visitation rights. Although behind bars, the authorities, fearing a chain reaction, gave in to these mothers' demands, and Layla Zana has related this brush with the police as a turning point in her awakening as a political activist. She began reading voraciously, wrote for various publications, passed a proficiency exam for a high school diploma; in fact, the first Kurdish woman to do so in her city.

These were the years when the wall in Berlin came down, the Soviet Union