

pounds of food from Campbell's Soup. Since the "Stamp Out Hunger" program's inception nearly 400 million pounds of food have been collected and distributed to hundreds of local food banks and pantries. The food drive comes at a critical time to help food banks and pantries restock their bare shelves that have emptied from the winter months.

I commend the thousands of letter carriers and the millions of postal customers that contributed to the success of this year's "Stamp Out Hunger" food drive. These individuals can should be proud knowing that their contributions will make a difference.

RECOGNIZING ANN BANCROFT

HON. BILL LUTHER

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 16, 2001

Mr. LUTHER. Mr. Speaker, my home state of Minnesota is proud of its strong and historic pioneer spirit. The often-brutal winters of Minnesota that early inhabitants endured, however, are no match for the icy tundra of Antarctica, recently traversed by a woman from Scandia, Minnesota.

Ann Bancroft is the first woman ever to cross the ice to the North and South Poles. She dogsledded 1,000 miles to the North Pole as the only female member of the Steger Expedition and led the 67-day American Women's Expedition to the South Pole on skis. Not content with these outstanding achievements, she also founded and led the nonprofit Ann Bancroft Foundation, dedicated to celebrating the successes of women and girls.

In the true spirit of a pioneer, Ms. Bancroft not only crossed geographic boundaries, but she traveled across gender barriers as well to become an inspiration for women and girls around the globe. Her work continues to celebrate the potential and the victories of women every day. I want to take this opportunity to recognize Ann Bancroft for her bravery not only to go where no woman has gone before, but also for encouraging young women to reach for their own dreams.

HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEMS IN KAZAKHSTAN

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 16, 2001

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to call attention to the lamentable human rights situation in Kazakhstan. On April 4, in a meeting with Kanat Saudabaev, Kazakhstan's new Ambassador to Washington, I welcomed his desire for cooperation and his willingness to improve his country's image, but I emphasized that Kazakhstan's reputation has indeed been badly tarnished and that concrete actions, not implausible pledges of democratization, were necessary. Considering the recent political trends in that important Central Asian country, I would like to share with my colleagues a number of the concerns I raised with Ambassador Saudabaev.

As a Washington Post editorial pointed out on May 1, President Nursultan Nazarbaev has

recently been intensifying his longstanding campaign of repression against the political opposition, independent media, and civil society. Especially alarming is the escalation in the level of brutality. In the last few months, several opposition activists have been assaulted. Platon Pak of the "Azamat" Party was stabbed on February 7. Fortunate to survive, he said his attackers told him to "deliver their message to the head of his political party." On March 1, Ms. Gulzhan Yergalieva, the Deputy Head of the opposition "People's Congress of Kazakhstan" and a well-known journalist, was—along with her husband and son—attacked and robbed in her home. Prior to these incidents, both opposition parties strongly criticized the Kazakh Government's running of an electoral reform working group. In late February, Alexandr Shushannikov, the chairman of the East Kazakhstan branch of the "Lad" Slavic Movement, was beaten by unknown assailants in the town of Ust-Kamenogorsk.

Less violent harassment of the opposition has continued unabated. Amirzhan Kosanov, the Acting Head of the Executive Committee of the opposition Republican People's Party of Kazakhstan (RNP), found threatening graffiti in the stairwells of his apartment building, on the doors of his apartment, and on neighboring buildings on March 17. Later that night, hooligans threw rocks at the windows of the apartment of Almira Kusainova, the RNP's Press Secretary. In one case, a large rock shattered one of the windows.

To add insult to injury, Mr. Kosanov has been barred from leaving Kazakhstan. He is the former Press Secretary of Akezhan Kazhegeldin, Kazakhstan's former Prime Minister and now the exiled head of the RNP. Claiming Mr. Kosanov had access to "state secrets," the authorities have confiscated his passport—even though he had left Kazakhstan many times before. To round out the campaign against Mr. Kosanov, a series of articles and reports in pro-government media have accused him of adultery and pedophilia.

In addition, Pyotr Afanasevko and Satzhan Ibrayev, two RNP members who were Mr. Kazhegeldin's bodyguards, were sentenced in April 2000 to three years in prison for a weapons offense; an appeals court upheld the convictions. The OSCE Center in Almaty has stated that it considers the charges to be political in nature. Moreover, these two individuals, as former members of the security forces, should be in special prisons instead of being incarcerated among the general prison population, where they are in danger.

Along with the targeting of opposition activists, the ongoing crackdown on freedom of the press has continued. Most media outlets have long been under the direct or indirect control of members of the president's family, leaving independent and opposition media under constant pressure and at serious risk. After the opposition weekly XXIst Century printed articles last October about alleged corruption by President Nazarbaev, the publication's editor, Bigeldy Gabdullin, was charged with "harming the honor and dignity of the President." On April 3, Yermurat Bapi, editor of the opposition weekly SolDat, was convicted of "publicly insulting the dignity and honor of the President." The court also ordered that the print run of SolDat in which the offending article appeared be destroyed.

Mr. Bapi, who was sentenced to one year in jail and ordered to pay \$280 in court ex-

penses, was immediately pardoned under a presidential amnesty. Still, his conviction remains on the books, which will prevent him from traveling abroad, among other restrictions. Mr. Bapi is appealing the verdict. As for Mr. Gabdullin, the prosecutor's office issued a press release on April 6 stating that it had dropped the case against him due to "the absence of [a] crime," although his newspaper has not yet received formal confirmation.

While both editors are currently at liberty, as the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) points out, their newspapers cannot publish in Kazakhstan because local printers will not risk angering local officials. In an April 17 letter to President Nazarbaev, CPJ concluded that "we remain deeply concerned about your government's frequent use of politically-motivated criminal charges to harass opposition journalists" and called on him "to create an atmosphere in which all journalists may work without fear of reprisal."

Apart from intimidating individual journalists and publications, Kazakhstan's authorities have taken legal action to restrict freedom of speech. The country's Senate on April 17 approved a draft media law that limits the retransmission of foreign programs and will also subject Internet web pages to the same controls as print media. Moreover, media outlets can be held responsible for news not obtained from official sources. In other words, if the New York Times or CNN runs stories Kazakhstan's leadership finds distasteful, Kazakh media outlets risk legal sanction for re-running those reports. Considering the ongoing investigations by the U.S. Department of Justice into high-level corruption in Kazakhstan, it is easy to draw inferences about what kinds of stories the authorities would eagerly spike. Indeed, although Mr. Gabdullin and Bapi were formally prosecuted for articles in their newspapers, both had also previously signed an open letter, published in the January 15 edition of Roll Call, expressing their support for the investigation.

Mr. Speaker, Kazakh authorities have also stepped up harassment of NGOs. The OSCE Center in Almaty, the Washington-based National Democratic Institute (NDI), and Internews-Kazakhstan had jointly organized public forums in 9 regions of Kazakhstan to educate local citizens, media, and interested parties about the proposed amendments to the media law. After the law's passage, local organizers of these Forums on Mass Media were called in to the Procuracy for "conversations." Other government agencies which took part in this intimidation were the Tax Police and the Financial Police.

According to OSCE sources, the authorities offered local NGOs "friendly" advice about not working with the OSCE and NDI. In Atyrau, one NGO contacted by the Financial Police did not even participate in these forums but that did not stop the police from sending a written request for information on "whether or not your organization had contacts with the OSCE or NDI in 2000–2001." Clearly, the authorities are singling out NGOs which maintain contacts with the OSCE and NDI and warning them about the possible consequences. In some instances, the authorities have made good on the implied threat and opened tax investigations into NGOs, seizing their documents and even computers, as happened in Almaty and Karaganda. This campaign is a blatant attack on the activities of the OSCE, of

which Kazakhstan is a participating State, and other international organizations which promote democratization.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, to round out a very depressing picture, Kazakhstan's parliament is reportedly working towards the adoption of amendments to the law on religion that will severely limit freedom of conscience. The draft provisions would require at least 50 members for a religious association to be registered (the law currently requires 10). In order to engage in "missionary activity," which would involve merely sharing religious beliefs with others, individuals—citizens or not—would have to be registered with the government, and religious activity would be permitted only at the site of a religious organization, which could bar meetings in rented facilities or even private homes. Violation of these provisions could lead to a sentence of one-year in prison or even two years of "corrective labor," and to the closing of religious organizations.

These draft amendments to the religion law were introduced in Kazakhstan's parliament in early April. According to the U.S. Embassy in Almaty, no date has been scheduled for discussion of the legislation though it is expected the measure will be considered before the current session ends in June. The U.S. Government, the OSCE, and other international agencies have expressed concern about the possible restriction of religious liberty, and there is reason to fear the worst.

In recent months, the attitude underlying these draft amendments has already had a real impact on believers. American citizens who did humanitarian work in several cities in Kazakhstan have been harassed, intimidated and eventually deported. The formal cause of their expulsion was violation of administrative regulations but one official told an American the real reason was because they were Christians. In one particularly brutal, ugly case, Americans who had been told to leave the country were preparing to do so when the authorities brought them back from the airport so they could be videotaped for TV broadcasts portraying them as engaging in various sorts of subversive activities. An American family preparing to leave Ust-Kamenogorsk was harassed by a Kazakh security official who threatened to spend the entire night in their tiny apartment to make sure they left. It took several hours before he could be persuaded to leave, despite the fact that his presence was frightening a pregnant American woman.

Jehovah's Witnesses have also reported stepped-up harassment and intimidation. Over the past few months, central and local media have been attacking Jehovah's Witnesses, who are depicted as religious extremists. In one bizarre case, according to the Witnesses, a television station broadcast video footage of Islamic terrorists, who were described as Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as footage of a police raid on a meeting held in a private home.

Kazakhstan's new Administrative Violation Code, which went into effect in February, allows the suspension or prohibition of religious organizations for evading registration or for violating assembly rules. This has already been used to suspend the activity of a group of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kyzyl-Orda. A similar case is pending in Taraz.

Just today, May 16, Keston News Service reports that authorities have declared a Baptist church in the town of Kulsary (Atyrau region) illegal and ordered it to stop all meetings,

claiming that it may not function until it is registered. In fact, Kazakh law does not ban activity by religious communities without registration, but the regional prosecutor upheld the ban. Church leaders intend to appeal the decision, but local lawyers are afraid to take such a case.

Keston further reports that on April 10, the authorities in Kyzylorda fined a Baptist church 7,750 tenge (about \$53) and suspended its activities until it obtains registration. In February, police had raided a Kazakh-language service at that church, demanding that participants show their identity documents and write statements about the gathering. They confiscated religious writings in Kazakh and Russian, and took five people, including the leader of the service, Erlan Sarsenbaev, to the police station. According to the Baptists, the police told them "During the Soviet times, believers like you were shot. Now you are feeling at peace, but we will show you." When Sarsenbaev refused to write a statement, police officers "began to hit him on his neck, abdomen and head with a plastic bottle filled with water." Finally, they forged his signature, and wrote the statement on his behalf.

As President Bush recently said, "the newly independent republics of Central Asia impose troubling limits on religious expression and missionary work." This trend in Kazakhstan is especially disturbing because despite the consistent consolidation of presidential power and general crackdown on opposition and dissent, relative religious freedom had been one of the bright spots. It seems this bright spot is about to disappear.

Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago, Erlan Idrisov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, visited Washington. In his public speaking engagements, he focused on Kazakhstan's emphasis on stability and its desire for good relations with its neighbors. These are understandable priorities which the United States has every reason to support. But Minister Idrisov simply discounted charges of human rights problems, arguing on May 2 at the Carnegie Endowment that the above-mentioned Washington Post editorial is "not the final word" on the human rights situation in his country.

Minister Idrisov may disagree with any Washington Post editorial, if he likes. But when you consider many other sources, such as the State Department's report on human rights practices, the Committee to Protect Journalists (which last year named President Nazarbaev one of the world's ten worst enemies of the media), and the OSCE Center in Almaty, the overall impression is clear and indisputable. Despite official Kazakh claims about progress, the human rights situation is poor and threatens to get worse. If President Nazarbaev wants to change that impression and convince people that he is sincere about wanting to democratize his country, he must take concrete steps to do so. The time is long past when we could take his assurances at face value.

RECOGNIZING VERNA IRENE SWOBODA

HON. SAM GRAVES

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 16, 2001

Mr. GRAVES. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Verna Irene Swoboda, a lifelong resident of St. Joseph, Missouri, who is celebrating her 90th birthday, today, May 16, 2001. She was born in St. Joseph in 1911, the only daughter of Thomas and Vera Moore, along with her four brothers, Joseph, Wilbur, Norman, and Mason. She was married to her late husband, Ralph J. Swoboda, for 61 years.

Verna's four children, Rachel, Tom, Vera, and Gloria are hosting a birthday celebration for her on May 26th at the home of her daughter, Rachel, in St. Joseph. It is expected that her entire family, including nine grandchildren and eight great grandchildren will attend, many coming from out of state. Also, her many friends in the senior residence where she lives in her own apartment plan to celebrate with her on May 16th.

Verna enjoys good health and is very active with her family, her church, her friends, and her hobbies. She still enjoys painting, writing poetry, reading good books, and working on her scrapbooks and picture albums. She is a very spunky lady with a very sharp wit and is adored by all who know her. She can tell a very good story and has always been proud of her Irish heritage, and she is especially proud of her hometown of St. Joseph.

Again, I want to wish Verna Irene Swoboda all the very best on her 90th birthday.

THE STATE AND LOCAL CANDIDATE FAIRNESS ACT

HON. F. JAMES SENENBRENNER, JR.

OF WISCONSIN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 16, 2001

Mr. SENENBRENNER. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing legislation to extend to the principal campaign committee of state and local candidates for elective public office the same graduated tax rates which apply to the principal campaign committee of a candidate for Congress.

In running for Congress, Members of the House are made aware of the Section 527 tax laws that apply to congressional campaign committees. What many Members of Congress may not be aware of is the unfair tax treatment of campaign committees for state and local candidates. Recently, state representatives from my home state of Wisconsin brought to my attention the burdensome tax laws involving the graduated tax rates applicable to interest bearing accounts for state and local campaign committees. Under current law, the tax rate applied to the interest earned by a campaign committee is determined by which office the candidate seeks. State and local candidates are forced to pay a 35% tax rate while congressional candidates pay only 15% on interest bearing accounts for their primary campaign committees.

That is why I am introducing the State and Local Candidate Fairness Act. This legislation would allow state and local candidates to pay