

LEACH), for his introduction of the North Korean Human Rights Act; and I want to thank my good friend, the gentleman from American Samoa (Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA), for his hard work on this bill as well.

Mr. Speaker, United States policy towards North Korea has been an important item on the foreign policy agenda for over a decade, stretching through both the Clinton and the Bush administrations. Given the threat to the United States and to our key allies posed by North Korea's pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, the focus of our diplomatic resources has correctly been on ending the destabilizing nuclear and missile programs of North Korea.

While it is inevitable that security matters will remain at the heart of our dialogue regarding North Korea, I am very much concerned that the United States has paid insufficient attention to the human rights situation in the North and the humanitarian consequences of the horrendous misrule by North Korea's leadership.

Mr. Speaker, the legislation before the House is designed to correct this imbalance. The North Korean Human Rights Act will ensure that the United States does not fail to tackle North Korea's appalling human rights record as we attempt to resolve our differences with the North.

As we know all too well, the human rights situation in North Korea is one of the world's worst. Over a decade, a vast number of North Korean citizens starved to death because of their government's gross incompetence, while the North Korean leadership dined on sushi flown in fresh from Japan. Hundreds of thousands of citizens languish in brutal North Korean gulags with no hope of release.

The political system itself is Stalinist to the core. No elections. No freedom of the press. No freedom of assembly. No words of dissent. No criticism of the government or of North Korean leader Kim Jong Il.

In short, Mr. Speaker, the North Korean people have no hope of changing their government unless the international community stands up for human rights and democracy in the North and continues to push the North aggressively for change.

The misrule in the North has also created a significant refugee situation in Northeastern China. Hundreds of thousands of North Koreans have fled to China in hopes of gaining their freedom. The Chinese Government has refused to treat these North Koreans as refugees, and many have been pushed back over the border to a most uncertain fate.

It is critically important that the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees have access to this floating population, and that North Korean refugees be treated appropriately.

Mr. Speaker, the legislation before us tackles all of these important subjects. It will direct that human rights remain

on the negotiating table with the North. It demands better accountability for international food aid to North Korea. It encourages a solution on the North Korean refugee issue in China. And it attempts to increase American broadcasting into North Korea.

This bill is exceptionally well researched and well-crafted, and I strongly support its passage.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. LEACH. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, briefly, in conclusion, let me just stress that the circumstances in North Korea have provoked one of the great humanitarian tragedies of our time. It is understandable that there are so many refugees, understandable that so many people have voted with their feet to seek greater opportunity in neighboring countries like China, like Mongolia.

But this Congress is simply trying, in a humanitarian way, to deal with that circumstance. We are not trying to express any geopolitical strategy, other than to help people that need our assistance.

Beyond that, I would say that there is strong bipartisan support, I think I can say that, for the administration trying to work as carefully as possible on the geostrategic issues in the six-party context, but this bill is about humanitarian issues and nothing else.

Mr. Speaker, I urge this Congress to take a unanimous vote on this subject.

Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 4011, the North Korea Human Rights Act, of which I am an original cosponsor.

The human rights conditions in North Korea are abysmal. As we know, the North Korean regime apports and withholds resources based on perceived citizen loyalty to the regime. From 1994 to 1998 at least two million North Koreans perished from starvation and related diseases, while nearly 50 percent of all North Korean children are malnourished to the point that it threatens their physical and mental health.

This dire situation has forced many North Koreans to risk life and limb to flee into China. As many as 300,000 North Korean refugees are hiding in the Chinese countryside. Chinese authorities continue an aggressive crackdown—actively hunting down North Korean refugees and forcibly repatriating them to North Korea. Once returned to North Korea, they face torture, imprisonment, and even execution.

The International Relations Subcommittee on Asia has held hearings on North Korea's human rights abuses, where we have heard testimony from North Korean defectors. Ms. Lee, a former North Korean party official, described life in a North Korean gulag. She said, "A prisoner has no right to talk, laugh, sing or look in a mirror. Prisoners must kneel down on the ground and keep their heads down deeply whenever called by a guard. They can say nothing except to answer questions when asked. Prisoners have to work as slaves for up to 18 hours a day. Repeated failure to meet the work quotas means a week's time in a punishment cell. A prisoner must give up

their human worth." She also told us, with the help of simple—yet shocking—illustrations, about chemical weapons tests and other atrocities that she witnessed which were performed on prisoners.

Unfortunately, this grim reality has been glossed over. This bill is an important statement as to how the United States Congress views the situation in North Korea. It is also the moral policy given the horrendous human rights condition north of the border.

In order to ensure his survival, Kim Jong Il tries to keep an iron grip on all information in North Korea. Control of information is absolutely crucial—because the system is based on lies. The propaganda is so great, that defectors actually report that they believed that their impoverished country was wealthier than South Korea. U.S. backed Radio Free Asia is countering this propaganda, bringing objective news to the North Korean people. Surveys indicate that North Korean defectors are listening to RFA's broadcasts.

That is why this bill calls for the increase of radio broadcasts into North Korea to twelve hours per day. And because of the problem of access to suitable radios in North Korea, the legislation requests a report detailing the steps the U.S. government is taking to increase the availability of information inside North Korea—including the provision of radios—to maximize North Koreans access to foreign broadcasts like Radio Free Asia.

Whatever one's views on how to handle the North Korea challenge, I believe that there is a strong consensus to bring about change in North Korea. Mr. Speaker, as you know, the concept here is to do as we did with Eastern Europe—flooding repressed people with broadcasts from Radio Free Europe. When we talk with Lech Walesa and Vaclav Havel, they tell us that the biggest factor in changing attitudes behind the Iron Curtain was the ability to listen to Radio Free Europe's broadcasts.

This legislation is a responsible initiative to promote human rights, refugee protection, and increased transparency in the delivery of humanitarian aid to the North Korean people. It deserves our support.

Mr. LEACH. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. LEACH) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 4011, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

URGING GOVERNMENT OF BELARUS TO ENSURE DEMOCRATIC, TRANSPARENT, AND FAIR ELECTION PROCESS

Mr. LEACH. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 652) urging the Government of the Republic of Belarus to ensure a democratic, transparent, and fair election process for its parliamentary elections in the fall of 2004.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. RES. 652

Whereas the establishment of a democratic, transparent, and fair election process

for the 2004 parliamentary elections in the Republic of Belarus and of a genuinely democratic political system are prerequisites for that country's integration into the Western community of nations;

Whereas the Government of Belarus has accepted numerous specific commitments governing the conduct of elections as a participating State of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), including provisions of the Copenhagen Document;

Whereas the election in the fall of 2004 of Belarus's next parliament will provide an unambiguous test of the extent of the Belarusian authorities' commitment to implement these standards and build a democratic society based on free elections and the rule of law;

Whereas previous parliamentary elections in Belarus have not fully met international standards;

Whereas it is the duty of government and public authorities at all levels to act in a manner consistent with all laws and regulations governing election procedures and to ensure free and fair elections throughout the entire country, including preventing activities aimed at undermining the free exercise of political rights;

Whereas a genuinely free and fair election requires a period of political campaigning conducted in an environment in which neither administrative action nor violence, intimidation, or detention hinder the parties, political associations, and the candidates from presenting their views and qualifications to the citizenry, including organizing supporters, conducting public meetings and events throughout the country, and enjoying unimpeded access to television, radio, print, and Internet media on a non-discriminatory basis;

Whereas a genuinely free and fair election requires that citizens be guaranteed the right and effective opportunity to exercise their civil and political rights, including the right to vote free from intimidation, threats of political retribution, or other forms of coercion by national or local authorities or others;

Whereas a genuinely free and fair election requires the full transparency of laws and regulations governing elections, multiparty representation on election commissions, and unobstructed access by candidates, political parties, and domestic and international observers to all election procedures, including voting and vote-counting in all areas of the country;

Whereas control and manipulation of the media by national and local officials and others acting at their behest could raise grave concerns regarding the commitment of the Belarusian authorities to free and fair elections;

Whereas efforts by national and local officials and others acting at their behest to impose obstacles to free assembly, free speech, and a free and fair political campaign could call into question the fairness of the upcoming elections; and

Whereas the arrest or intimidation of opposition political parties and candidates such as the leader of the United Civic Party and others involved with the opposition including those associated with the Coalition Five Plus represents a deliberate assault on the democratic process: Now, therefore, be it Resolved, That the House of Representatives—

(1) looks forward to the development of cordial relations between the United States and the Republic of Belarus;

(2) emphasizes that a precondition for the integration of Belarus into the Western community of nations is its establishment of a genuinely democratic political system;

(3) expresses its strong and continuing support for the efforts of the Belarusian people to establish a full democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights in Belarus;

(4) urges the Government of Belarus to guarantee freedom of association and assembly, including the right of candidates, members of political parties, and others to freely assemble, to organize and conduct public events, and to exercise these and other rights free from intimidation or harassment by local or national officials or others acting at their behest;

(5) urges the Government of Belarus to meet its Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) commitments on democratic elections;

(6) urges the Belarusian authorities to ensure—

(A) the full transparency of election procedures before, during, and after the 2004 parliamentary elections;

(B) free access for Belarusian and international election observers;

(C) multiparty representation on all election commissions;

(D) unimpeded access by all parties and candidates to print, radio, television, and Internet media on a non-discriminatory basis;

(E) freedom of candidates, members of opposition parties, and independent media organizations from intimidation or harassment by government officials at all levels via selective tax audits and other regulatory procedures, and in the case of media, license revocations and libel suits, among other measures;

(F) a transparent process for complaint and appeals through electoral commissions and within the court system that provides timely and effective remedies; and

(G) vigorous prosecution of any individual or organization responsible for violations of election laws or regulations, including the application of appropriate administrative or criminal penalties;

(7) further calls upon the Government of Belarus to guarantee election monitors from the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), other participating States of the OSCE, Belarusian political parties, candidates' representatives, nongovernmental organizations, and other private institutions and organizations, both foreign and domestic, unobstructed access to all aspects of the election process, including unimpeded access to public campaign events, candidates, news media, voting, and post-election tabulation of results and processing of election challenges and complaints;

(8) encourages the international community, including the Council of Europe, the OSCE, and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, to continue their efforts to support democracy in Belarus and urges countries such as Lithuania and other Baltic countries and Nordic countries to continue to provide assistance to nongovernmental organizations and other Belarusian organizations involved in promoting democracy and fair elections in Belarus; and

(9) pledges its support to the Belarusian people, their commitment to a fully free and open democratic system, their creation of a prosperous free market economy, and their country's assumption of its rightful place as a full and equal member of the Western community of democracies.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. HENSARLING). Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. LEACH) and the gentleman from California (Mr. LANTOS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. LEACH).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. LEACH. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H. Res. 652.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Iowa?

There was no objection.

Mr. LEACH. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H. Res. 652, which calls on the Government of Belarus to ensure that parliamentary elections which will take place in October of this year are democratic, transparent, and fair.

Thirteen years after the fall of Communism, Belarus remains one of the few nations in Europe where the transition to democracy has not taken sufficient root. The current political leadership continues to rule in an authoritarian manner and its government continues to track down those individuals and organizations who are trying to help build support for democracy and democratic institutions.

Unlike the situation in Ukraine, the government in Belarus has thus far not given any clear indication that it is committed to free and fair elections. However, in a recent meeting with the ambassador from Belarus, the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BEREUTER) of the Subcommittee on Europe was led to believe that the government's positions on the elections could be positive. The ambassador gave assurances that the government would enforce the elections codes and would allow all political parties to have representatives on the electoral commissions which oversee implementation of the elections. He also indicated that Belarus would cooperate with the OSCE and would allow international observers.

At a hearing the Subcommittee on Europe held in March on Belarus, the gentleman from Nebraska (Chairman BEREUTER) pointed out that the gentleman from Illinois (Speaker HASTERT) and several Members met with the leaders of the Belarus opposition, collectively known as the Coalition Five-Plus, to discuss the elections and their visions for a democratic future for Belarus.

This group of political parties is united in a common platform in an attempt to bring democracy and respectability back to the Belarus Parliament.

□ 1900

Unfortunately, members of the opposition political parties and participants in political demonstrations continue to be subjected to harassment, surveillance by government agents, arrests and physical abuse. For these reasons, it is important that the United States Government, including this Congress, continue to emphatically express our strong support for free, fair, and transparent elections.

In Europe, the situation in Belarus understandably seems to be of equal

concern. The OSCE, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe have all expressed deep concerns over Belarus and its forthcoming elections. In fact, members have been informed that the Chair of the Belarus Working Group of the OSCE Parliamentary Working Assembly recently visited Minsk for additional discussions on the elections.

Mr. Speaker, H. Res. 652 emphasizes that if Belarus is ever to become more integrated into the community of democratic nations, it must work toward the establishment of a genuinely democratic political system in which the freedom of association and assembly are guaranteed. It also must be a fact that political candidates from the opposition should be free from political harassment and intimidation as they campaign for office, and in which the media is free to act independently, free from government control or intimidation.

Finally, there must be a system in which elections and the electoral process are open, transparent, and fair if Belarus wishes to be included in the community of democratic nations.

The parliamentary elections this fall will be a litmus test for President Lukashenko's commitment to democracy and the direction he intends to take Belarus in the future.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, H. Res. 652 rather precisely explains the concerns and recommendations of the United States House of Representatives. It has been crafted by the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BEREUTER), and the Congress is in his debt for emphasizing the importance of this issue to the people of Belarus, as well as Europe and the United States.

I also would like to thank the distinguished ranking member of the committee, the gentleman from California (Mr. LANTOS), for his leadership on so many issues, particularly those that relate to the historical transitions taking place in Eastern Europe.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly support this resolution and urge all of my colleagues to do so as well.

Over the past 2 decades, totalitarian government after totalitarian government has fallen to the forces of democracy in one of the greatest achievements of the modern era. Tin-pot dictators and brutal military thugs have been tossed out of their ruling palaces, replaced by leaders chosen in fair elections, leaders willing to govern in an open and transparent manner.

Sadly, Mr. Speaker, some dictatorial regimes continue to cling to power, using brutal force, intimidation, and torture to resist the worldwide trend towards democracy. Without a doubt, Alexander Lukashenko Belarus is a rising star in the world's list of rogue dictators.

In 1996, Lukashenko amended the constitution in a flawed referendum and in 2001 extended his term in office through an election that was neither free nor fair. He stole local elections in March and in November of 2003.

Mr. Speaker, the list of Lukashenko's violations of internationally recognized human rights does not end with fraudulent elections. Political opponents are intimidated, arrested, or disappear without a trace. Independent media outlets have been closed, and journalists are prevented from writing the truth.

Nongovernmental organizations have been closed. United States nongovernmental organizations attempting to promote political party development have been kicked out of Belarus. Trade union leaders have been repressed, and religious freedom has been eroded. In short, Mr. Speaker, the human rights and democracy situation in Belarus is on a steady downwards path.

Belarus is now preparing for parliamentary elections in October. Our resolution calls upon the Government of Belarus to ensure that these important elections are conducted in a free and fair manner.

The United States and the European Union have been working jointly to encourage the government to conduct these elections in an open manner under the watchful eye of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. I have no confidence, however, that Lukashenko has any intention of listening to the voices of his own citizens or those of the international community who are demanding political change.

Yet, the Government of Belarus must understand that we will never forget the cause of human rights and the cause of democracy in Belarus, and that the United States and Belarus will never have fully normal relations until Belarus moves assertively and convincingly towards a democratic form of government.

I strongly support passage of this resolution, and I urge all of my colleagues to do so as well.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. LEACH. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. SHIMKUS).

Mr. SHIMKUS. Mr. Speaker, it is great to be down here on the floor with my friends and colleagues who want to continue to push for freedom and democracy. I dabble in this as not a professional on the committee, but I cannot think of a better way to spend one's additional free time than to work with the colleagues and friends that I have on the Committee on International Relations in promoting freedom and democracy. If the United States is not about freedom and democracy for ourselves and for other countries, then what are we for?

The great words of the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. LEACH) and, of course, the gentleman from California (Mr.

LANTOS), I cannot really add to them. I just want to add my voice to the chorus of many, as Chair of the Baltic Caucus and concerned about that region of Europe, and, really, the last dictator in Europe and his oppression of the democratic movement, that he needs to be placed on notice.

They have upcoming elections. They are not being conducted fairly and freely, and there is harassment, there is intimidation, there are beatings. Even by their own rules, they are not allowing fair coverage by the state-run television media. It is important for us here to let them know publicly, through this debate and through passage of this resolution, that we are watching and that we are not going to go away; and we are going to join with our friends in the international community. We are going to join with our friends in Western and Eastern Europe and the NATO countries, and we are going to continue to say, for the sake of your own people, for the sake of freedom and democracy and economic growth and vitality, join the Western free countries. Tear down your borders, open up your system, allow your people to choose.

There are very credible organizations and groups of committed citizens of Belarus joined in the Party of Five, very disparate elements, different ideologies. They so much want freedom and democracy that they have put aside the ideological debate on how to run a government, to say, let us have democracy. Let us first get to the basic, fundamental principles of democracy and freedom, and then let us, in a peaceful setting, sometimes probably as rancorous as we have on the floor of the House, let us then, in open debate, decide how we are going to do that.

I have met with them. They are patriots, and they are again from the far right and the far left, and they only want one thing. They want access to the political system and the democratic process.

We are watching. This resolution continues to put Mr. Lukashenko on notice that we are not going to go away. The international community is here, we are behind not only the people of Belarus, not only the people of the region, but the whole international community in calling for free, fair, and honorable elections this October.

I thank the members of the Committee on International Relations, especially the chairman and the ranking member, for making sure that this is put on record and that we have a chance to speak on it on the floor tonight. I look forward to working with my colleagues in the future.

Mr. LEACH. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. HENSARLING). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. LEACH) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 652.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds of those present have voted in the affirmative.

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

AMENDING THE MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE ACT OF 2003 TO EXTEND THE AUTHORITY TO PROVIDE ASSISTANCE TO COUNTRIES SEEKING TO BECOME ELIGIBLE COUNTRIES FOR PURPOSES OF THAT ACT

Mr. LEACH. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H. R. 4660) to amend the Millennium Challenge Act of 2003 to extend the authority to provide assistance to countries seeking to become eligible countries for purposes of that Act, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 4660

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. FINDINGS; PURPOSE.

(a) FINDINGS.—Congress makes the following findings:

(1) On March 14, 2002, the President stated: "America supports the international development goals in the U.N. Millennium Declaration, and believes that these goals are a shared responsibility of developed and developing countries."

(2) Section 201(b)(4) of H.R. 1950, as passed by the House of Representatives on July 16, 2003, states that it is the policy of the United States to support compacts of the Millennium Challenge Account which, among other things, aim "to reduce poverty by significantly increasing the economic growth trajectory of beneficiary countries through investing in the productive potential of the people of such countries".

(3) On May 10, 2004, the President recognized the link between global poverty and the national security of the United States by stating: "In many nations, poverty remains chronic and desperate. Half the world's people still live on less than \$2 a day. This divide between wealth and poverty, between opportunity and misery, is far more than a challenge to our compassion. Persistent poverty and oppression can spread despair across an entire nation, and they can turn nations of great potential into the recruiting grounds of terrorists."

(4) Section 602 of the Millennium Challenge Act of 2003 (22 U.S.C. 7701) states that a purpose of that Act is "the elimination of extreme poverty".

(5) The Report of the Committee on International Relations to accompany H.R. 2441 of the 108th Congress (H. Rept. 108-205) states that "[f]or the Millennium Challenge Account to be successful as an incentive for future reform as well as a reward for past reform, it must offer opportunities for those low-income countries whose institutions do not yet meet all the eligibility criteria but who are demonstrating partial success in meeting the eligibility criteria".

(6) The purpose of section 616 of the Millennium Challenge Act of 2003 (22 U.S.C. 7715),

and the "threshold program" established pursuant to such section by the Millennium Challenge Corporation, in consultation with the United States Agency for International Development, is to provide assistance to the low-income countries described in paragraph (5) in order to assist such countries to become eligible countries under the Act.

(b) PURPOSE.—The purpose of this Act is to amend the Millennium Challenge Act of 2003 to authorize funding of the "threshold program" under section 616 of such Act for the same duration as the authorization of funding for the overall Millennium Challenge Act of 2003.

SEC. 2. EXTENSION OF AUTHORIZATION OF ASSISTANCE TO CERTAIN CANDIDATE COUNTRIES.

Section 616(d) of the Millennium Challenge Act of 2003 (22 U.S.C. 7715(d)) is amended by striking "for fiscal year 2004" and inserting "for a fiscal year".

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. LEACH) and the gentleman from California (Mr. LANTOS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. LEACH).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. LEACH. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the bill under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Iowa?

There was no objection.

Mr. LEACH. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 4660 is an amendment to the Millennium Challenge Account, or MCA, of 2003 to extend the authority to provide assistance to countries seeking to become eligible countries for purposes of that act.

Last session, Congress authorized the Millennium Challenge Account to provide substantial development assistance to high-performing, low-income countries through fiscal year 2005. Recently, the Board of Directors of the Millennium Challenge Corporation selected 16 countries that are eligible to receive MCA assistance.

At issue with this resolution is the problem of how to deal with countries that just missed passing the eligibility bar.

The Millennium Challenge Account authorized the MCC to provide limited assistance through a threshold program to these countries for the purpose of improving in the areas where they fell short. This was done partly in recognition of the fact that many threshold countries have limited resources to invest in the well-being of their people.

This amendment will authorize funding of the threshold program and match the duration of the threshold program to that of the MCA. This will allow us to continue to support the preparation of worthy threshold countries for their full participation in the Millennium Challenge Account.

Mr. Speaker, I believe this bill will improve the Millennium Challenge Ac-

count program and advance the interests of the United States. I urge my colleagues to support the bill.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume and I rise in strong support of this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, half of the world's population still lives on less than \$2 a day. What this means is that approximately 3 billion men, women, and children, or a population 10 times the size of ours, awake each morning to little food, dirty water, inadequate shelter, and no health care.

□ 1915

Alleviating this crushing poverty around the globe is a moral imperative, but it is also related to our national interests.

Persistent poverty has made generations of men, women, and children vulnerable to infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. It has also bolstered the appeal of extremist ideologies which preach hate and intolerance. Mr. Speaker, the Millennium Challenge Account has already begun to mitigate the effects of global poverty and to provide poor citizens around the world with the tools for their advancement.

But for the MCA to succeed fully and to maintain solid congressional support, the Millennium Challenge Corporation must undertake serious efforts to expand the number of countries that will benefit from the millennium initiative.

The lucky 16 countries that are currently eligible to receive MCA assistance represent only about 3 percent of the world's poor. The most effective way to expand the number of poor countries that can receive MCA funds is through a program for threshold countries that just miss clearing the eligibility bar. Unfortunately, the threshold program is only authorized through the current fiscal year. My legislation helps ensure that the millennium initiative continues to be available to as many poor people as possible by reauthorizing the threshold program for as long as the MCA operates.

Mr. Speaker, in order for the MCA to achieve its stated goal of reducing poverty, the CEO of the Millennium Challenge Corporation must focus his attention on more than just stimulating economic growth in eligible countries. Our experience in our own country has made it painfully clear that trickle-down economics tends to push the working poor further into misery rather than provide them with better economic opportunities.

Effective poverty reduction requires investments in education, health, and other sectors which directly contribute to building the human capacity of these countries. It demands policies that close the gap between the rich and the poor in developing nations by providing equal access to assets such as