

Chechnya and Russia, but never let threats to her life dissuade her from her passion. She was once quoted as saying, "journalists have a duty to report on the subject that matters, just as singers have to sing and doctors have to heal."

Despite her critical attitude toward her country's political leadership, Anna Politkovskaya possessed a deep warmth and love for its people. She cared for Russia, and wanted nothing else for the country and its people than to see it become a true democracy free from corruption and fear. Her death, said former Russian leader Mikhail Gorbachev, ". . . is a savage crime against a professional and serious journalist and a courageous woman. It is a blow to the entire democratic, independent press. It is a grave crime against the country, against all of us."

Madam Speaker, the Russian government has announced the arrest of several persons implicated in Anna Politkovskaya's murder, and the actual shooter has reportedly been determined. However, the investigation itself appears to have raised more questions than answers, which is, unfortunately, a characteristic of many high-profile investigations in Russia nowadays. Let us hope that the investigation will be brought to a successful conclusion, and that Anna Politkovskaya's killers, who or wherever they are, will be brought to justice.

HONORING COACH BOB ROMBACH
RETIREMENT

HON. KENNY MARCHANT

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, October 5, 2007

Mr. MARCHANT. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor Duncanville High School Panther Baseball Coach Bob Rombach for 39 years of dedicated coaching and teaching.

After graduating from Denton High School in 1961, Coach Rombach signed a professional baseball contract with the Houston Colt 45's organization. He spent the off-seasons studying for his Bachelor's Degree and graduated in 1968 from North Texas State University.

His first coaching position was in Amarillo. Since then he has led five different baseball programs and is recognized as one of the most successful and respected coaches in Texas High School Baseball. Coach Rombach's accolades are not only numerous but prestigious as well. He has been named Texas Coach of the Year twice, received a number of district honors and was coach of the North-South All-Star Game. In November of 1990, Coach Rombach was elected into the Texas Baseball Hall of Fame after guiding the Panthers to the Class 5A State Championship. In 2000, he was selected by the Texas High School Baseball Coaches Association for the Hall of Fame.

As coach of the Duncanville Panthers, Coach Rombach's teams have reached the playoffs 22 times in 23 seasons. They have earned a trip to the Texas State Tournament in Austin six times and won the state title in 1990. His career record is 859 wins and 362 losses and his record at Duncanville High School is 565 wins with 180 losses. During his distinguished tenure at Duncanville, Coach Rombach has seen thirty of his players drafted with nine playing in the big leagues.

Coach Rombach and his wife, Deanna, have three children: daughters, Amy and Tracy and son, Deron, who is a national cross checker for the Baltimore Orioles. They have seven grandchildren.

Madam Speaker, in closing I would like to commend and congratulate Coach Bob Rombach on all of his accomplishments. His dedication and commitment to coaching and teaching is worthy of recognition. I wish Coach Rombach a happy and healthy retirement and it is an honor to represent him in the 24th District of Texas.

PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION
OF H.R. 3648, MORTGAGE FOR-
GIVENESS DEBT RELIEF ACT OF
2007

SPEECH OF

HON. KENDRICK B. MEEK

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 4, 2007

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be a co-sponsor to this bill that will provide relief to those people in my district, the entire State of Florida, and the country as a whole who are losing their homes.

Foreclosures in south Florida are escalating way too quickly. They have tripled in Miami-Dade County and more than doubled in Broward County from this time last year. In fact, Florida as a whole is second only to Nevada in new foreclosures from January through March of this year.

Why this fast increase in foreclosures? Mostly because lenders gave high-priced loans to borrowers during the housing boom, particularly borrowers in low-income, largely minority neighborhoods. Starting in 2000, because property values were rising quickly, financial institutions made risky loans that put them and the borrowers in jeopardy. About \$1.3 trillion in subprime loans was lent to these borrowers. Specifically to south Florida, in Miami-Dade, about 23 percent of these loans are subprime—in Broward about 18 percent are subprime—in Miami Gardens about 66 percent are subprime.

Florida homeowners are now bearing about one tenth of that 1.3 trillion dollar debt. This is more than any other state except California. Now the value of these homes is declining but these homeowners have this huge outstanding mortgage debt. It's bad enough that these homeowners are losing their homes, but under current law they would also have to include their discharged mortgage debt in their income and pay tax on it.

This bill will give some relief to those homeowners by eliminating that tax. Equally important, the bill will help those homeowners who are doing their best to avoid foreclosures—those that are having a portion of their mortgage discharged as part of a restructuring of their debt.

It is time for those homeowners in Florida and elsewhere to get this badly needed tax relief.

MEJA EXPANSION AND
ENFORCEMENT ACT OF 2007

SPEECH OF

HON. JOHN D. DINGELL

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 4, 2007

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 2740) to require accountability for contractors and contract personnel under Federal contracts, and for other purposes:

Mr. DINGELL. Mr. Chairman, I have followed with interest news reports from Iraq documenting some of the terrible atrocities that have been committed at the hands of military contractors hired by the United States. I have been keenly interested in the recent congressional hearings that have been held on this matter. Based on what I have learned, I am pleased today that the House of Representatives is considering this bill, which would ensure that those who do business with the United States Government in Iraq can be held accountable when they commit criminal acts. Unfortunately, I cannot be present for the vote today, but I wanted to ensure I submitted this statement of support so the record will reflect that I am strongly in favor of the goals of this important bill.

This bill is a fair and sensible way to ensure that military contractors can be prosecuted for their criminal actions in a U.S. court. This is important both because it gives the government a way to police the behavior of these contractors, and also because it shows the Iraqi people that the United States is serious about the rule of law. While I am glad Congress is taking this action now, I remain concerned about the Bush Administration's failure to take steps to investigate or prosecute those who committed wrongdoing in the past. I believe Congress should continue to investigate these incidents and ensure that those responsible are held accountable.

TRIBUTE TO COMMAND SERGEANT
MAJOR FRANK D. GROSS

HON. IKE SKELTON

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, October 5, 2007

Mr. SKELTON. Madam Speaker, let me take this moment to recognize the extensive career of Command Sergeant Major Frank D. Gross. CSM Gross has spent over 41 years serving in the Missouri Army National Guard and Engineer Regiment.

Frank Gross earned a master's degree in education from Central Missouri State University. In 2001, he successfully completed the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy. During his career, CSM Gross has been awarded over 18 medals and ribbons for his selfless leadership and dedication. He is highly respected by his peers, as well as by the soldiers who he has led.

CSM Gross's service to our country in wartime has been invaluable. Beginning in 2002, Gross served as CSM for the 35th Engineer Brigade for over 2 years, where he supervised the deployment of three battalions and two

companies. Due to CSM Gross's exceptional guidance, these units effectively completed the missions to which they were assigned.

Currently, CSM Gross is the Missouri State Command Sergeant Major for the Joint Force Headquarters. In this capacity, he is responsible for the enlisted soldiers' promotion system, as well as training other CSMs. I'm certain that Members of the House will join me in honoring Command Sergeant Major Gross for his outstanding service to our country.

PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION
OF H.R. 3246 REGIONAL ECONOMIC
AND INFRASTRUCTURE
DEVELOPMENT ACT OF 2007

SPEECH OF

HON. SHEILA JACKSON-LEE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 4, 2007

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 3246, the Regional Economic and Infrastructure Development Act of 2007. I would like to thank my colleague, Representative OBERSTAR, for introducing this important legislation, as well as for his leadership on this important issue.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation creates a comprehensive regional approach to economic and infrastructure development in some of the most severely economically distressed regions of our nation, authorizing \$1.25 billion through Fiscal Year 2012 for two existing commissions and three new regional economic development commissions. It authorizes these five regional economic development commissions under a common framework of administration, providing a rubric for economic development planning.

All five regional commissions will employ the model of the highly successful Appalachian Regional Commission, crafted in the 1960s to address persistent poverty in the Appalachian region. The Appalachian Regional Commission, through the several hundred projects it funds annually, has created thousands of new jobs, as well as improving local water and sewer systems, increasing school readiness, expanding access to health care, assisting local communities with strategic planning, and providing help and resources for new businesses. Crucially, this model combines targeting communities with greatest need with a unified framework of management and decision-making.

Two of the five regional commissions authorized by today's legislation, the Delta Regional Commission and the Northern Great Plains Regional Commission, are existing entities that will be reauthorized by this legislation. The first of these, the Delta Regional Commission, was proposed by President Clinton in 1998, and is designed to strengthen the economic development of the chronically impoverished lower Mississippi River area. Included in this region are counties in Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee.

In addition to systemic poverty and underdevelopment, this region is particularly in need of support after the devastation of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Hurricane Katrina resulted in more than 1,800 deaths, nearly 500,000 homes in Louisiana and Mississippi being de-

stroyed or made uninhabitable, and about 1.5 million people being at least temporarily displaced from their homes. From housing to health care to education, the region remains in a state of crisis. Though this Congress has directed more than \$6.4 billion in assistance to the victims of this disaster, we still have a great deal of work to do to rebuild these devastated communities.

Other regions will also greatly benefit from this legislation. The Northern Great Plains Regional Commission encompasses all counties in Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota, as well as certain counties in Missouri. The Southeast Crescent Regional Commission consists of all counties in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Florida that are not served by the Appalachian Regional Commission or Delta Regional Commission. The Southwest Border Regional Commission covers certain counties in Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas. The Northern Border Regional Commission includes specified counties in Maine, New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont.

For each of these commissions, this legislation establishes membership, voting structure, and staffing, as well as outlining conditions for financial assistance, authorizing grants to local development districts, and establishing an Inspector General for the commissions. It also includes additional provisions designed to produce a standard administrative framework. By providing a uniform set of procedures, this bill creates a consistent method for distributing economic development funds throughout the regions most in need of such assistance and ensures a comprehensive regional approach to economic and infrastructure development in the most severely distressed regions in the country.

H.R. 3246 authorizes the appropriation of \$1.25 billion from 2008–2012 to establish these development commissions. It also directs the five regional commissions to award grants to state and local governments, Indian tribes, and nonprofit organizations to promote economic and infrastructure development. At least 40 percent of the authorized funds will be directed to grants to develop transportation, telecommunications, and other basic public infrastructure. Remaining funds will be used for other economic development activities, such as providing job training, improving public services, and promoting conservation, tourism, and development of renewable and alternative energy projects.

Mr. Speaker, the Appalachian Regional Commission has had great success bringing about economic revitalization and improving the lives of many residents of the region. I believe that this legislation can make significant strides toward bringing similar development to five more regions of our nation. These commissions will stimulate struggling economies, and they will help strengthen communities by providing education and job training and supporting local entrepreneurship and leadership.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to working with my colleagues, in the future, to work to extend coordinated economic development projects to some of our nation's urban areas. Many inner city areas of our country suffer from a level of economic distress similar to that felt by residents of the regions addressed by this bill, and I believe that we can do a great deal to assist the economic development of these urban areas as well.

Mr. Speaker, this is extremely important legislation that will go a long way toward improving the quality of life for significant numbers of Americans. It will create prospects for the future and strengthen communities. I believe this is extremely important legislation for our nation, and I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting it.

ETHIOPIA HUMAN RIGHTS ACT OF
2007

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, October 5, 2007

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Madam Speaker, in the Ogaden region, the Ethiopian Government is fighting an insurgency but has carried the war to the innocent population. The Ethiopian Government has put the region under effective commercial blockade, prevented humanitarian assistance from reaching the suffering population, and expelled humanitarian NGOs. We have reports that troops have also raped women, burned villages, and confiscated livestock on a large scale.

In Somalia we have reports that the Ethiopian army has raped and pillaged. Of course brutality is not limited to the Ethiopian army. It is rampant in the Ogaden and Somalia, where insurgents, warring clans, and terrorists all intentionally inflict misery on the land. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees has reported that nearly 500,000 people, almost one third of Mogadishu's population, have fled in recent months as conditions in the city have deteriorated.

But the United States Government is the staunchest international supporter of the Ethiopian Government of Prime Minister Meles. Our government supplies Meles with over \$100 million in aid every year, much of it military. We cannot do this and pretend that we don't share responsibility for the human rights abuses perpetrated by the Meles regime. We cannot do this and criticize China for supporting the barbarous Sudanese regime of Omar al-Bashir.

We all know that the Ogaden region of Ethiopia and in Somalia is extremely complicated. Yet the moral imperative is not complicated. A good end cannot be justified by a bad means.

While we want to deny jihadist terrorists any "platform" in the Horn of Africa, we must not protect ourselves—and our Allies—from terrorists by enabling the Ethiopian government to visit terror on the Ogaden region or Somalia. We can only work with the Meles government if we do everything possible to change its behavior.

This means we have to be willing to do more than "dialogue" with President Meles. We have to be willing to withdraw aid if his government does not dramatically improve its human rights record.

That is why I supported the Ethiopia Human Rights Act, H.R. 2003, which passed the House on October 2, 2007. This bill will withdraw certain forms of aid to the Ethiopian Government, including forms of military aid, if it does not meet certain human rights benchmarks, spelled out in the legislation.

The reports from the Ogaden and Somalia are the latest in a long series of human rights outrages. In August 2005 I visited Ethiopia