

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

and met with some of those opposition figures imprisoned by Prime Minister Meles, including Hailu Shawel, the Chairman of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy, the largest democratic opposition party.

I also met with Meles. I brought up the June 2005 slaughter of almost 200 prodemocracy demonstrators in Addis, and the mass arrests that followed. I urged him to investigate that atrocity, to punish those responsible, and to release political prisoners. Meles told me, "I have a file on all of them, they are all guilty of treason."

We should all be skeptical of the value of dialogue on human rights reform with a man who would make a comment like that.

I believe that our government has not pushed Prime Minister Meles hard enough on human rights issues because it is satisfied that his government is cooperating with us in the war on terror. The war on terror is very, very important; but no regime that terrorizes people can be a reliable ally in the war on terror. Terrorism isn't just a military issue, it's also a human rights issue. Terrorists come from countries where governments failed to respect

their human rights. In promoting human rights in Ethiopia, we are attacking terrorism at its roots.

America's commitment to promote respect for human rights around the world demands that we prevail upon Prime Minister Meles to respect human rights. I call upon our government to withdraw forms of aid and support to the Meles government to release its remaining political prisoners, to spare civilians in its counterinsurgency operations, and to permit humanitarian aid in the Ogaden.