

to the Middle East has been a major disappointment, but opportunity is knocking nearby in Central Asia and we should be taking advantage of it. But there isn't much time.

The opportunity for positive change was created by the death late last month of Turkmenistan's despotic dictator, President Saparmurat Niyazov, whose role model was Josef Stalin. The urgency for the United States to act is created by those who want to follow in his footsteps.

The Turkmen people deserve the right to elect their leaders in free and fair elections. That seems highly unlikely because of the junta that has tried to consolidate power in the aftermath of Niyazov's sudden demise. Consisting of the remaining holdouts from Niyazov's government and controlled by his former bodyguards, the junta leaders have pledged to continue the "dear leader's" style of "democracy," ordering yet another statue of him to be built.

The constitution has been re-written to allow the junta's candidate to run in the presidential elections—scheduled for February 11—virtually unchallenged. The regime's most competent opponents—the exiled community of business leaders and intellectuals—have effectively been prevented from contesting the elections.

For too long the United States has ignored Niyazov's abuses and we continue to fail to articulate our official position regarding relations with the "interim government." I call on the Secretary of State to condemn the junta's unconstitutional actions and demand that it allow its opponents to participate in the February 11 election. Until that happens, the United States must refuse to recognize the government in Ashgabat as legitimate, and order federal agencies, including Treasury, State and Justice, to block all of its banking activities.

Nurmuhammet Hanamov, the founding chairman of the Republican Party of Turkmenistan who was his country's former ambassador to Turkey and Israel, has written an incisive article in the Washington Post calling on the West to take advantage of Niyazov's passing to help lead his country toward Democracy. A leader of the prodemocracy movement, Mr. Hanamov was forced into exile and his two sons were assassinated in 2005 in retaliation for his outspoken opposition to the regime. I ask that his article be included in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD so that all may read the heartfelt plea of this courageous individual.

[From the Washington Post, Jan. 3, 2007]

A NEW BEGINNING FOR TURKMENISTAN
(By Nurmuhammet Hanamov)

Last week Turkmenistan buried its brutal dictator, Saparmurat Niyazov. His ruthless reign spanned two decades, during which time his policies became increasingly irrational and unpredictable. The long list of Niyazov's crimes against our people includes: banning all political parties except his own and jailing his opponents; preventing thousands of "disloyal" citizens from traveling abroad; persecuting religious and ethnic minorities; outlawing opera; and shutting down regional hospitals, firing thousands of doctors and nurses. Under Niyazov, Turkmenistan became a corridor for heroin trafficking from Afghanistan to the West and gained for itself one of the highest heroin addiction rates in the world.

Above all, Niyazov was a selfish and kleptocratic despot, stashing billions in pro-

ceeds from the sale of the country's enormous natural gas resources in personal accounts in Western banks. He used this money to fuel his outlandish personality cult, building opulent palaces and golden statues of himself even as his people were deprived of basic necessities and suffer one of the world's lowest life expectancy rates. The West's indifference was striking compared with the relentless criticism by the United States and the European Union against the more benign regime of Alexander Lukashenko, president of gas-poor Belarus.

With Niyazov gone, the West has a historic second chance to help our country make a peaceful transition to democracy. Turkmenistan's interim rulers have unfortunately pledged to continue Niyazov's policies (even ordering new statues of him), and their efforts to grab power amount to a coup d'état. The former health minister—under the de facto control of Niyazov's Presidential Guard—has arrested the speaker of Parliament, who constitutionally is next in the line of succession. He has sealed the country's borders and, using other unconstitutional measures, has set the stage for his own unchallenged victory in presidential elections scheduled for Feb. 11.

The United States must send a clear message to Niyazov's holdouts in the "interim government" in Ashgabat: that they will not have its support unless they agree to hold free and fair elections—ones that allow all citizens of Turkmenistan, including exiled opposition leaders and political prisoners, to take part.

We know that the United States has tried to help the people of Turkmenistan in recent years, and thanks to American educational exchange programs, there is a thriving community of bright Turkmen students and intellectuals who are living in Western countries and are ready to return and help rebuild their country. This community is largely held together by the efforts of Khudaiberdy Orazov, a former chairman of the National Bank and an accomplished and energetic leader who was forced into exile several years ago. He was unanimously nominated to be a candidate in the February presidential elections by a broad coalition of opposition groups inside and outside of Turkmenistan. According to a recent poll, Orazov's candidacy would have the support of a majority of Turkmen voters. Until Orazov and other opposition candidates are allowed to contest the February elections, the United States and the European Union must refrain from recognizing the junta in Ashgabat and freeze all personal accounts of Niyazov and his cronies abroad. We hope that members of Congress and other government officials will visit Turkmenistan soon to personally deliver that message.

We must rebuild our country, and with the help of our friends and neighbors we can do it in an open and transparent way. Priorities for a democratically elected government during the initial post-Niyazov reconstruction must be to release all political prisoners, conduct open tenders and allow Western companies to bid for a stake in developing Turkmenistan's oil and gas fields; to consider new ways of getting our gas and oil to Western markets; to restore private property that Niyazov confiscated from Turkmen citizens; and to create a reconstruction fund using Niyazov's personal bank accounts and proceeds from the sale of oil and gas to revive the health-care and education systems.

The United States is spending billions of dollars trying to turn Afghanistan and Iraq—both deep in the throes of civil war—into democratic nations while all but abandoning their peaceful post-Soviet neighbors to the north. Turkmenistan is ready for a new beginning, and the West must finally step up to

the plate. To do otherwise would waste a historic opportunity and allow yet another case of popular discontent with an illegitimate government to become an anti-Western lost cause.

THE GENETIC INFORMATION NONDISCRIMINATION ACT

HON. LOUISE M. SLAUGHTER

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 16, 2007

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Madam Speaker, it is with great pride today that I reintroduce the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act. I have championed this bill for nearly 12 years, and I am hopeful that this will be the year that it is finally enacted into law.

We all watched with excitement when the first phase of the Human Genome project was successfully completed in April 2003, as scientists finished sequencing the human genome. As a result of this breakthrough, scientists have now identified genetic markers for a variety of chronic health conditions, thereby increasing the potential for early treatment and prevention of numerous diseases.

Genetic issues are insinuating themselves into not only health care decisions, but into many other facets of Americans' lives. For example, under a program called Dor Yeshorim, Hasidic youth take a battery of genetic tests to determine whether they are carriers for any of 10 serious genetic disorders. Young men and women who are both carriers for a given disorder are discouraged from courting each other, based on the fact that there would be a 25 percent chance that their children would be born with a genetic disorder.

Today, there are over 15,500 recognized genetic disorders, affecting 13 million Americans. Yet, each of us possesses some potentially lethal genes. And despite the scientific advances that are helping people prevent these diseases or diagnose them early, those who partake of this innovative technology become potential victims of genetic discrimination. This legislation works to eliminate that potential.

In the past, some have called this legislation "a solution in search of a problem" and suggest that genetic discrimination is rare, if it even happens at all. Unfortunately this is not the case. Despite the fact that these tests are potentially life-saving, many Americans have not taken advantage of this technology because they fear discrimination by insurance companies and their employers.

And these fears are not unfounded. Throughout the 1970s, many African Americans were denied jobs, educational opportunities, and insurance based on their carrier status for sickle cell anemia, despite the fact that a carrier lacked the two copies of a mutation necessary to get sick. In 1998, Lawrence Livermore Laboratories in Berkeley was found to have been performing tests for syphilis, pregnancy, and sickle cell on employees without their knowledge or consent.

These abuses have only fed the public fear of genetic discrimination. Much to the detriment of America's public health and the future benefits of scientific research, this fear

has led many individuals to decide against having genetic tests or participating in genetic research.

A study conducted from 2001 to 2003, surveyed 86,859 adults about their willingness to undergo genetic testing. The results, published in June 2005, revealed that 40 percent of participants surveyed felt genetic testing was not a good idea for fear that health insurance companies might deny or drop them from their insurance plan.

The Genetics and Public Policy Center at Johns Hopkins University conducted similar surveys. In 2002, 85 percent of those surveyed did not want employers to have access to their genetic information. By 2004, that number had risen to 92 percent. In 2002, 68 percent of those surveyed said their genetic information should be kept private from health insurers; by 2004, it had increased to 80 percent.

Fears about privacy do not just resonate with the public. Health care professionals are also hesitant to make their genetic information available. In one survey of genetic counselors, 108 out of 159 indicated that they would not submit charges for a genetic test to their insurance companies primarily because of the fear of discrimination. Twenty-five percent responded that they would use an alias to obtain a genetic test so as to reduce the risk of discrimination and maximize confidentiality. And, 60 percent indicated they would not share the information with a colleague, because of the need for privacy and fear of job discrimination.

Clearly, fear of discrimination plays a significant role in a person's decisions about whether to take a genetic test; whether to do it under one's own name; paying out of pocket versus seeking insurance reimbursement; and with whom the information would be shared, including health care providers, coworkers,

and family members. The American people desperately want protections against genetic discrimination guaranteed under federal law and the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act provides these protections.

This bill has broad support from the health community. The Coalition for Genetic Fairness which consists of 141 organizations has been outspoken in their support for GINA. Here in the House, along with my colleagues Ms. BIGGERT, Ms. ESHOO, and Mr. WALDEN, we are joined by over 135 original cosponsors. The Senate has passed it twice, and even the White House has come out in support of this bill.

GINA provides the protections from genetic discrimination that Americans want and would allow genetic research to move forward in this country so we can all live healthier lives.

I urge its quick passage.