

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

A TRIBUTE TO THE JESSIEVILLE LIONS

HON. MIKE ROSS

OF ARKANSAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 17, 2007

Mr. ROSS. Madam Speaker, it is with honor and great pride that I recognize and congratulate the Jessieville Lions of Jessieville, AR, whose outstanding teamwork and dedication on the football field earned them a Class 2A Arkansas State Title at War Memorial Stadium in Little Rock on December 8, 2006. The Jessieville Lions embody the spirit of teamwork, determination, and all that defines a champion.

As a parent, I value the important lessons that teamwork teaches our students in pursuit of a lifetime of success. I have long been an advocate of sports and extracurricular activities as they complement academic excellence, inspire leadership, and build character, which better prepare our State's students to face the challenges of the 21st century.

It is a tremendous honor to congratulate the Jessieville High School football program on winning the Class 2A Arkansas State Football Championship. I applaud the Jessieville Lions for their season. This victory is the result of hard work contributed by the players, students, coaching staff, faculty and the community. I salute all who remained focused on this goal and especially the players who rose to the occasion to become State champions. Congratulations Lions.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. CHARLIE NORWOOD

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 17, 2007

Mr. NORWOOD. Madam Speaker, on roll-call No. 26; on the motion to suspend the rules and agree to H. Res. 43, had I been present, I would have voted "yes."

U.S. GOVERNMENT SHOULD PRESS INTERIM GOVERNMENT OF TURKMENISTAN TO HOLD FREE AND FAIR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS ON FEBRUARY 11, 2006

HON. TOM FEENEY

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 17, 2007

Mr. FEENEY. Madam Speaker, the world has recently witnessed the deaths of two bloody despots: one—Saddam Hussein—was executed for crimes against his own people; the other—President Saparmurat Niyazov of Turkmenistan—was able to escape justice by dying in his sleep.

Under President Niyazov, Turkmenistan became a secretive police state modeled after North Korea. Declaring himself President-for-life, Niyazov banned all political parties except his own; threw his opponents in jail or drove them into exile; and established a state monopoly on media, exercising control over the editorial content.

With the death of the dictator, one would hope that the people of Turkmenistan would finally wake up from their long nightmare and reclaim their rights, chief among them the right to elect their leaders in free and fair elections. However, the interim government has pledged to continue Niyazov's policies and has brought into question their ability to hold truly democratic elections.

The interim government's most competent opponents—the exiled community of business leaders and intellectuals—have effectively been prevented from contesting the elections, even though their leader Khudaiberdy Orazov, whom the united opposition chose as its presidential candidate, would win the majority of the popular vote according to the most recent polls. As former chairman of the Central Bank and a renowned economist, Mr. Orazov is precisely the kind of leader whose insights are badly needed if Turkmenistan is to rebuild its crumbling infrastructure and revive its ailing education and healthcare systems.

I urge my colleagues in calling for free, fair, and democratic elections in Turkmenistan and for the interim government to allow its opponents the opportunity to contest the February 11 elections. In order to maintain our commitment to democracy, both at home and abroad, we can do no less.

I am including for the RECORD a copy of Jan. 3 Washington Post article, "New Future for Turkmenistan," which was written by a well-respected pro-democracy opposition leader in exile, Nurmukhammet Hanamov, whose two sons were assassinated in retaliation for his outspoken opposition to Niyazov's regime. The U.S. government would do well to hear the heartfelt plea this courageous man makes in his article.

[From The Washington Post]

A NEW BEGINNING FOR TURKMENISTAN

(By Nurmukhammet 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 proceeds from the sale of the country's enormous natural gas resources in personal ac-

counts 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.

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.