EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

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THE RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT IS CONDUCTING A FRONTAL Assault AGAINST FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

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OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I am extremely concerned about the very disturbing reports from Russia which indicate that Kremlin authorities are intimidating, harassing and attempting to control the nation’s media. These unwarranted attacks have been directed primarily at Media-Most, which is the largest and most successful privately-owned television and publishing company in Russia.

Democracy and freedom are still new, and largely untested in Russia, and efforts are still underway to develop firmly rooted democratic institutions. Until now, however, press freedom has been one of the early successes in Russia. The transformation from a totalitarian society to one that permits true freedom, including free speech and uncensored news reporting.

Mr. Speaker, any efforts to impose government censorship or control over any news media—and particularly over private news organizations—would be a tragic and serious setback for democratization in Russia. The news media must be free to report, even when it is critical of the government. There is absolutely no justification for government authorities to threaten media companies as a means of controlling what is reported in the news.

I want to report to my colleagues in the Congress about recent disturbing actions by the Russian government that seem to be directed at some of the most professionally respected news organizations in Russia. Reports from Moscow indicate that the Director of Presidential Administration, Mr. Alexander Voloshin, is engaged in a personal campaign against the prestigious NTV and other private news organizations because he is dissatisfied with how the news media are covering the government and its activities.

It has been widely reported by wire services that the Federal Tax Policy Service of the Russian Federation is relentlessly monitoring the financial and economic activities of privately owned television companies, publishing houses, and other mass media outlets. The Russian Government appears to be involved in a campaign of targeting these news organizations in order to undertake investigations or other legal of quasi-legal actions against those who own or operate independent news media outlets.

Mr. Speaker, another form of harassment has been an effort to censor the media. Just this month, the Russian Government established the Ministry for Publishing, Television and Radio aimed at “consolidating” the government’s “ideological work.” That last phrase, Mr. Speaker, is a chilling throw-back to conditions under the totalitarian Soviet regime, when the government and Communist Party made a concerted and successful effort to control and manipulate the media under the rubric of “ideological work.”

The head of this new ministry is a “press czar” who has been equipped with power to...