Russia’s Leaders Should Embrace and Encourage Freedom of the Press

HON. PETER DEUTSCH
OF FLORIDA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Friday, July 30, 1999

Mr. DEUTSCH. Mr. Speaker, as Russia prepares for Parliamentary and Presidential elections, there are alarming signals that the Kremlin is cracking down on privately owned news outlets who have been critical of government policies. In particular, I understand that the independent and highly regarded television station, NTV, has been pressured by officials who are displeased with its news coverage of the Kremlin. There are reports that the owners and reporters of NTV and other news organizations have been harassed, and that government agencies have threatened to deny operating licenses to these organizations, have attacked private media companies through state-owned media, and have issued veiled threats to nationalize NTV and other private media outlets.

Such activities undermine Russia’s free and democratic nature. I find particularly disturbing reports that Yeltsin Administration head Alexander Voloshin has asked his staff to find any grounds possible by which to initiate criminal action against owners of private media enterprises. The most notable example is Mr. Voloshin’s order to the Director of the Tax Police Federal Service to carry out inspections of the editorial offices of media outlets owned by Media Most, the largest privately owned media company in Russia, headed by Vladimir Goussinsky. The fact that Mr. Goussinsky has consistently submitted tax returns and paid all taxes required by current law since 1992 was apparently insufficient in stopping these egregious searches.

Free press may also be threatened on another front. In August, the government established a new Ministry for Publishing, TV and Radio with the task, according to Prime Minister Stepashin, of “consolidating” the government’s “ideological work.” This new ministry will have vast powers to oversee and control news content and other aspects of Russian media, including publishing, licensing regulations, advertising, satellite broadcasting, and press distribution. Mr. Speaker, I am extremely concerned about the possible effects that this new Ministry’s policies might have on private and independent media outlets.

Whoever controls the media in Russia may publicly reinforce the government’s favorable views of President Boris Yeltsin’s re-election campaign made that favorable television coverage of President Yeltsin’s order to the Director of the Tax Police Federal Service to carry out inspections of the editorial offices of media outlets owned by Media Most, the largest privately owned media company in Russia, headed by Vladimir Goussinsky. The fact that Mr. Goussinsky has consistently submitted tax returns and paid all taxes required by current law since 1992 was apparently insufficient in stopping these egregious searches.

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Introduction of the Spokane Tribe Settlement Act

HON. GEORGE R. NETHERCUTT, JR.
OF WASHINGTON
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Friday, July 30, 1999

Mr. NETHERCUTT. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce The Spokane Tribe of Indians of the Spokane Reservation Grand Coulee Dam Equitable Compensation Act. This legislation will provide a settlement of the claims of the Spokane Tribe of Indians resulting from its contribution to the production of hydropower by the Grand Coulee Dam. Similar settlement legislation was enacted in 1994 to compensate the neighboring Confederated Colville Tribes, That Act, P.L. 103–436, provided for a $53 million lump sum payment for past damages and roughly $15 million annually from the ongoing proceeds from the sale of hydropower by the Bonneville Power Administration to the Colville Tribes. The Spokane Settlement Act, which I am introducing today, provides for a settlement of the Spokane Tribe of Indians claims directly proportional to the settlement afforded the Colville Tribes based upon the percentage of lands

INTRODUCTION OF THE FEDERAL RAILROAD SAFETY ENHANCEMENT ACT

HON. RONNIE SHOES
OF MISSISSIPPI
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Friday, July 30, 1999

Mr. SHOWS. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing the Federal Railroad Safety Enhancement Act of 1999. This bill is unique in two ways: it is premised on zero tolerance for railroad accidents and injuries, and it is supported by all of rail labor.

Railway accidents have caused people in my district to suffer tragically. Several approaches to rail safety will be considered and it is important that the voices of all concerned parties be heard. The Federal Railroad Safety Enhancement Act is an approach that has been crafted by a coordinated effort of the many unions representing railway workers. We must pay heed to the workers who operate and maintain our rail system, just as we must pay heed to rail management and federal authorities that oversee our railways. We must keep an open mind as we examine all proposals so that we can pass legislation that best address this urgent matter.

Mr. Speaker, over the past few years, the railroad industry has achieved a reduction in the number of fatalities and in the number of certain types of accidents, such as collisions and grad-crossing accidents. But the number of derailments and employee fatalities has remained almost unchanged, and some key safety issues have not been adequately addressed.

For example, it is clear that in rail transportation, as in other modes of transportation, tired workers with insufficient rest present serious safety and health problems that must be addressed. While some individual rail unions continue to evaluate this issue in craft-specific need, we do know with respect to hours of service and fatigue management that there are a number of loopholes in current regulations that must be closed, and updates that must be made, to the current regime.

Mr. Speaker, whether it is these issues or others such as certification, van crew safety, passenger safety service standards, etc., the fact of the matter is that current rail laws do not adequately address rail safety.

The bill I am introducing today is one approach that would go a long way in achieving new levels of safety in the rail industry. We must carefully consider all approaches to rail safety, but if the “Federal Railroad Safety Enhancement Act of 1999” is the most we can do at this time to reach that goal, then it is the very least we must do.

Mr. Speaker, I urge members to join in support of this important piece of legislation.