

The government says it has no clues as to why. Up until now, the President only beat and jailed his opponents. The President now appears to be behind a series of disappearances by key opposition figures since April, as reported in the New York Times. Last week, the State Department said that it was greatly concerned about the pattern of disappearances and urged the government of Belarus to find and protect those who had vanished. The disappearances coincide with the strongest campaign yet launched by Belarus's pro-democracy movement to press the government for reforms.

The first person to disappear was the former chairwoman of the Central Bank (Tamara Vinnikova). She publicly supported the former prime minister, an opposition candidate, and was being held on trumped up charges under house arrest with an armed guard at the time she vanished. That she was held under house arrest, guarded at all times by live-in KGB agents, her telephone calls and visitors strictly screened, strongly suggests that her disappearance was orchestrated by the authorities.

In May, Yuri Zakharenka, a former interior minister and an opposition activist, disappeared as he was walking home. He was last seen bundled into a car by a group of unidentified men. His wife said for two weeks prior to his abduction, he had complained of being tailed by two cars.

At the height of protests in July, another opposition leader, speaker of the illegally disbanded parliament, fled to Lithuania, saying that he feared for his life.

Then two weeks ago, Victor Gonchar, a leading political dissident, and his friend, a publisher, vanished on an evening outing, even though Mr. Gonchar was under constant surveillance by the security police. Gonchar's wife reportedly contacted city law enforcement agencies, local hospitals and morgues without result. The government maintains that it has no information on his whereabouts. Mr. Gonchar has been instrumental in selecting an opposition delegation to OSCE-mediated talks with the government, and was scheduled to meet with the U.S. ambassador to Belarus on September 20. Earlier this year, police violently assaulted and arrested him on charges of holding an illegal meeting in a private cafe, for which he served ten days in jail.

Before President Lukashenko came to office in 1994, one could see improvements in the human rights situation in Belarus. Independent newspapers emerged, and ordinary citizens started openly expressing their views and ideas, opened associations and began to organize. The parliament became a forum for debate among parties with differing political agendas. The judiciary also began to operate more independently.

After Mr. Lukashenko was elected president, he extended his term and replaced the elected Parliament with his own hand-picked legislators in a referendum in 1996, universally condemned as rigged. Since then, he has held fast to his goal of strengthening his dictatorship. He has ruthlessly sought to control and subordinate most aspects of public life, both in government and in society, cracking down on the media, political parties and grass roots movements. Under the new constitution, he overwhelmingly dominates other branches of government, including the parliament and judiciary.

The first president of democratic Belarus, Stanislav Shushkevich, and now in the opposition, said recently that the government is resorting to state terrorism by abducting and silencing dissidents. He said, "the regime has gone along the path of eliminating the leaders against whom it can't open even an artificial case. This is done with the goal of strengthening the dictatorship."

I am deeply concerned that comments by senior government officials this past week which betray official indifference to those disappearances.

I urge President Lukashenko to use all available means at his disposal to locate the four missing—and to ensure the safety and security of all living in Belarus, regardless of their political views. What is happening in Belarus now is an outrage. The world is watching what President Lukashenko does to address it.

Mr. President, I want the Government of Belarus to know that their blatant violation of the human rights of citizens is unacceptable. The report several days ago of four prominent men and women who have had the courage to stand up against this very repressive Government of Belarus raises very serious questions. As a Senator, I want to speak from the floor and condemn that Government's repressive actions. I want to make it clear to the Government of Belarus that these actions, the repression and violation of citizens' rights in Belarus, is unacceptable, I think, to every single Senator.

I think many of us in the human rights community are very worried about whether or not they are still alive. I would not want the Government of Belarus to think they can engage in this kind of repressive activity with impunity. That is why I speak about this on the floor of the Senate.

#### ECONOMIC CONVULSION IN AGRICULTURE

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, let me, one more time, return to a question I have put to the majority leader, and then I say to my colleague from Arizona I will complete my remarks.

In the last 3 weeks now, I have asked for the opportunity to introduce legis-

lation—amendments—which would speak directly to what can only be described as an economic convulsion in agriculture, the unbelievable economic pain in the countryside, and the number of farmers who are literally being obliterated and driven off the land.

Up to date, I have not been able to get any kind of clear commitment from the majority leader as to when we will have the opportunity for all of us in the Senate to have a substantive debate about this and take action. For those of us in agricultural States, this is very important. I want to signal to colleagues that I will look for an opportunity, and the first opportunity I get, I will try to do everything I can to focus our attention on what can only be described as a depression in agriculture. I will try to focus the attention of people in the Senate, Democrats and Republicans alike, on the transition that is now taking place in agriculture, which I think, if it runs its full course, we will deeply regret as a Nation.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

#### AIR TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT ACT—Continued

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, for the benefit of my colleagues, we are nearing the end as far as amendments are concerned. We will be ready within about 20 minutes to a half hour to complete an amendment by Senator DORGAN. We are in the process of working on it. We have several amendments by Senator HATCH that we are trying to get so we can work those out. We have no report yet from Senator HUTCHISON on whether or not she wants an amendment. So if Senator HUTCHISON, or her staff, is watching, we would like to get that resolved. There is a modification of an amendment by Senator BAUCUS.

Other than that, we will be prepared to move to the previous unanimous consent agreement concerning debate on the Robb amendment and vote on that, followed by final passage. I believe we are nearing that point. So as we work out the final agreements on these amendments, I hope that within 10 or 15 minutes we will be able to complete action on that and be prepared to move to the Robb amendment debate and then final passage.

Mr. President, in the meantime, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative assistant proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### AMENDMENT NO. 1898, AS MODIFIED

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, on behalf of Senator BAUCUS, I send a modification to the desk and ask that it be accepted.