

I strongly agree with these sentiments. The concentration of media outlets in pro-regime hands, the ongoing assault on independent and opposition media and the circumscription of the media's legally-sanctioned subject matter pose a great danger to the development of democracy in Central Asia. Official statistics about how many media outlets have been privatized cover up an alarming tendency towards government monopolization of information sources. This effectively makes it impossible for citizens to receive unbiased information, which is vital if people are to hold their governments accountable.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that in Central Asia, the overall level of democratization and human rights observance is poor. Central Asian leaders make decisions in a region far from Western Europe, close to China, Iran and Afghanistan, and they often assert that "human rights are only for the West" or the building democracy "takes time." But delaying steps towards democracy is very risky in the multi-ethnic, multi-religious region of Central Asia, where many people are highly educated and have expectations of faster change. If it does not come, tensions and conflicts could emerge that could endanger security for everyone.

To lessen these risks, continuous pressure will be needed on these countries to move faster on democracy. Even as the United States pursues other interests, we should give top priority to democracy and respect for human rights, or we may live to regret not doing so.

REDUCING THE EFFECTS OF
ABUSE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
ON YOUTH, THE READY ACT

HON. SUE W. KELLY

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, November 10, 1999

Mrs. KELLY. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to introduce the Reducing the Effects of Abuse and Domestic Violence on Youth Act—also known as the READY Act. I am joined in introducing this legislation by Representatives CONNIE MORELLA, NANCY JOHNSON, CAROLYN MALONEY and JUDY BIGGERT. The READY Act is a first step toward addressing the multiple needs of children who witness or experience domestic violence.

In the past year, much has been done to find the cause of violence by our children. Tragic events like the ones at Columbine and Jonesborough have highlighted the violence faced by our Nation's youth. Working groups and commissions have been created across the Nation to study the cause of violence in our schools. Speaker HASTERT has created a bipartisan working group in the House, of which I am a member, to look at several aspects of our society and to identify which may influence the violent trend we have witnessed in our youth during the last several years.

However, as we know from study, one of the primary influences on socialization is the family. Over 3 million children witness violence in their own homes. It is here that my legislative focuses.

Witnessing domestic violence has a devastating impact on children, placing them at

high risk for anxiety, depression, and suicide. These children also may exhibit more aggressive, anti-social, fearful and inhibited behaviors. It is estimated that between 20 and 40 percent of chronically violent children have witnessed extreme parental conflict. Another study found that boys who had witnessed their father battering their mother had a 1,000 percent higher battering rate than boys who did not.

Clearly, witnessing this type of violence in the home has a profound effect on children. In order to combat this trend, the READY Act gives grants to qualified nonprofit agencies in order to create multi-level interventions for child witnesses. This program would create a partnership between entities like the courts, schools, health care providers, child protective services and battered women's programs to provide a system of cooperation and collaboration between the professionals in a community in order to better support these child witnesses.

Examples of intervention partnerships could include: security for the child and his or her family; mental health treatment; counseling and advocacy for the family; and outreach and training to community professionals. While many facets of this support system are currently in place, there is a gap in coordination and cooperation.

In another step to encourage coordination between various agencies, a second provision in the READY Act would encourage collaborative efforts between nonprofit domestic violence community agencies and schools to create a curriculum for K-12 students, as well as provide training for education professionals on experiencing and witnessing domestic violence. Training would include teachers, administrators, counselors and other school personnel. I believe that this provision is especially important in light of the determination that one-third of all 16-19 year old girls experience violence from an intimate partner.

Domestic violence often escalates during separation and divorce, and visitation is often used as an opportunity for abuse. Under my legislation grants would be provided to qualified applicants on a competitive basis to create family visitation or visitation exchange centers. Use of such centers will minimize the potentially dangerous interactions between family members.

On July 3, 1996, 5-year-old Brandon and 4-year-old Alex were murdered by their father during an unsupervised visit. Their mother Angela was separated from Kurt Frank, the children's father. During her marriage, Angela was physically and emotionally abused by Frank. Brandon was once hit by his father and had his lip split when he stepped in front of his mother during a domestic violence incident. Angela had an Order of Protection against Frank, but her request for her husband to receive only supervised visits was dismissed during custody hearings. Kurt Frank murdered his two sons during an unsupervised visit. While it is too late for Brandon and Alex, a secure visitation center will help to prevent other children from meeting the same fate.

The READY Act also allows the use of private pensions to settle child abuse judgments. Private pensions are currently used for alimony or child support payments, however

cannot be used to settle a child abuse judgment. This provision was originally submitted by my friend and colleague, CAROLYN MALONEY during the 105th Congress and I am happy to be able to include it in the READY Act. In addition, my legislation amends the Parental Kidnaping Prevention Act to provide a defense to women who flee across State lines to escape domestic violence or sexual assault, and ensures that a civil court can consider domestic violence and the parent and child's safety when determining which State should hear a custody dispute. This will pull the State and Federal laws regulating this area closer into line.

Finally, the READY Act includes a sense of the Congress stating that when determining child custody, it is not in the best interest of the child to force joint custody in cases where there is a history of domestic violence. This act also states, that it is also not in the best interest of the child to make so called "friendly parent" provisions a factor when there is abuse against a parent or a child. It is important for Congress to take the lead on this important issue.

In preparing to introduce this bill, I came upon a website that posted story after story from women who had been victims of domestic abuse. Of the dozens of stories that I read, one particular submission was especially poignant, by a 23-year-old woman named Lisa. Lisa had been married to her husband for 4 years, but altogether she has been with him for 6 years. He mentally and physically abused her and her children, just as her father had abused her and her mother. She is ready to leave him. She realized that her oldest child is 4 and, since he's a boy, she is afraid he will grow to be like her husband. Her youngest is 3 months, and she does not want her to end up where she is. Lisa ends her letter with the realization that she has to leave for the sake of her children. She writes of how she and her children have their whole lives ahead of them and it should not be a life full of fear.

Her letter was written over a month ago. Hopefully, since that time she has been able to flee her husband's abuse both to save herself and to save her children. Her lifetime has been testimony to the cycle of violence. For Lisa and her kids, it is time to break that cycle. While the road to healing begins with the knowledge that Lisa needs to save herself and her kids, more help is needed to repair the damage done during the years of abuse. Without it, chances are the cycle will continue.

As we all know, there are no easy answers or solutions to the violent acts of our youth. However, passage of the READY Act would be one solid step toward reducing the effects of abuse and domestic violence that is so clearly harming our youth.

TRIBUTE TO LA AGENCIA DE ORCI
& ASOCIADOS

HON. BRAD SHERMAN

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, November 10, 1999

Mr. SHERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise before you today to pay tribute to La Agencia de Orci