

A few weeks ago, President Bush met with members of the Congressional Black Caucus and remarked: "This is America. Everyone deserves the right to vote." However, as we all know now, the right to vote is not enough. Every vote also must be counted. The Voting Improvement Act will help us do just that, and will go a long way in restoring public confidence in our election system and our democracy itself.

BIPARTISAN CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION TRIP

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. OSBORNE). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2001, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to take the 1-hour Special Order to highlight a congressional delegation trip that transpired last week traveling to Moscow, Russia; Kiev, Ukraine; and Kishinev, Moldova. One of the areas that perhaps presents the greatest challenge to us over the next several years is our relationship with those critical countries.

The delegation that traveled to those countries was a bipartisan delegation. In fact, I was outnumbered. There were four Democrats and three Republicans. But it was a solid bipartisan effort. We had no disagreements and we had, I think, one of the most exciting series of meetings that any delegation has had in that part of the world.

It was a delegation that hit the ground running. We were hosted by the chairman of President Putin's political party in Moscow, the Unity Party, Boris Gryzlov. Even though our plane was late because of problems with the weather, we left on Saturday, we were hoping to arrive Sunday afternoon, we arrived in our hotel in Moscow at 12:30 a.m.; and there waiting for us was the Deputy Minister for Housing and Construction in Moscow.

So we had our first meeting at 12:30 in the morning until 1:30 in the morning. So those who say Members of Congress do not work, I would say this delegation worked. That was to set the tone for the trip. That was the first of 41 meetings that occurred during 5 days in the capital cities of Moscow, Kiev and Kishinev.

It was a very historically significant time because each of those countries are going through some very difficult turmoil. As we all know, Russia has been drifting away from the West. In fact, while we were there, we got an update on a new strategic partnership that Russia is now aligning itself with China.

In the Ukraine, we were there in the midst of a crisis as the President of that country, President Kuchma, was under severe criticism for having allegedly been taped in ordering the assassination of a prominent journalist in Ukraine. The people in many regards

were demanding, not just free press, but were demanding that President Kuchma be held accountable and be removed from office.

In Moldova, the meetings were equally significant because, 2 days after we were in Moldova, they had their parliamentary elections. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the Communists won control of the Moldovan parliament with 71 percent of the vote, a major shift in that country, a very strategically important country, a major shift away from the democratic reforms that have been occurring in Moldova over the past 8 years.

So that underscores the importance of the reason why our trip was significant.

I want to go through the trip in a great amount of detail, but I would like to call on my colleagues while they are here to make whatever comments they would like to make.

The cochair of the delegation is someone who I have the highest admiration for in this institution. He and I worked together on a number of issues, Russia being one of them. Seven years ago, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER) and I were able to convince our leadership, then Speaker Gingrich and Minority Leader GEPHARDT, that we should institutionalize the relationship between the Russian Duma, their parliament, and our Congress.

The gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER) and I have co-chaired that initiative for the past 7 years, and we have had dozens of meetings in America and in Russia trying to build a closer sense of cooperation with the parliamentarians in the Russian Duma in all fashions.

The gentleman from Maryland also is the first vice president of the Committee for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and so he represents our country on issues affecting the European community as it relates to Russia and other Nations. He also is the former chairman of the Helsinki Commission, so he has worked tirelessly for human rights throughout the world.

So it was a real pleasure to have the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER) on this trip.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER), my good friend and colleague, for his own summation of our trip.

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time and for his leadership. The gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON) and I have been friends since he came to the Congress many years ago.

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He serves on the Committee on Armed Services and is one of the most knowledgeable Members in the Congress on matters related to our national defense. But probably less well

known is his extraordinary depth of knowledge of Russia, of the former Soviet Union, of former Soviet officials, and present leaders in Russia itself. He is a friend of many, a colleague of others, and an interlocutor of many more.

Obviously, our relationship to Russia is one of the most important relationships that we have as a Nation. The relationship between Russia and the United States is one critical to international security and stability. As vice president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe, I have the opportunity to meet regularly with members of the Duma. However, under the leadership of the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON), and with the concurrence, as he pointed out, of then-Speaker Gingrich and minority leader GEPHARDT, we established a formal relationship.

It is interesting to note that the supreme Soviet, when the Soviet Union was still in existence, sought a formal relationship with the Congress. We demurred and did not want to enter such a relationship. The reason for that, of course, is they were not a democratically elected parliament. We have seen historic changes, revolutionary changes as Russia emerged as a new democracy. It is a democracy, obviously, struggling with its economy and struggling with a developing democracy. It was the thought of the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON), with which I strongly agreed, that the better and closer relationship they had with representatives of the people's House and of the United States Senate, really the examples for democratic parliamentary bodies in the world, it would assist them in their developing democracy and would assist us as well in establishing a relationship which would lead to better understanding and, therefore, more cooperation.

Mr. Speaker, the gentleman from Pennsylvania mentioned that I chaired and am now the ranking member of the Helsinki Commission. That commission focuses on human rights. I kidded when we were in Moscow, when Viktor Chernomyrdin was at dinner with us, that I was coming back to the United States and raising a human rights issue about the gentleman from Pennsylvania making us work so hard. Forty-one meetings in 4 days is quite a schedule. But I found the meetings extraordinarily productive, worthwhile, and I think establishing a better relationship between our two countries and, indeed, between the leaders in Moldova, although they are now new, and the leaders in the Ukraine, although now troubled.

I had to leave the trip early and go to Vienna for a meeting of the standing committee of the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe where I have the privilege of representing our country, but I know from

talking to Members who concluded the trip that it was an extraordinarily worthwhile trip.

The gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. HOEFFEL) is going to speak after me. He is a new Member of Congress. This was, I think, his first visit to Russia and to some of the former Soviet states. It was my 15th or 16th visit. The gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON) has been there, as I recall his saying, 23 times.

Mr. Speaker, we need to continue these visits. We need to continue this conversation. We need to continue with cooperation. There will, of course, be and are times when we disagree; but we need to disagree while talking to one another. We need to disagree while understanding the perspective of one another. It is critical for our own countries and critical for all the world, and I want to thank the gentleman for his leadership and to tell him how much I appreciate co-chairing the Congress-Duma committee with him and the worthwhile work that we and other Members of the House of Representatives and the United States Senate and the Duma are doing to establish an ongoing, continuing, positive relationship with this great merging democracy, Russia.

I thank the gentleman for yielding to me.

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. I thank the gentleman from Maryland for his leadership on this delegation and in the Congress and, actually, in the world. He is extremely well respected around the world for his commitment to principles that are important to any democratic nation.

Just to give our colleagues one example of one of the issues that the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER) raised repeatedly in Russia was freedom of the press. He arranged a meeting with one of those, a fellow by the name of Mr. Kiselov, who is the equivalent to our Dan Rather or one of those kinds of people, Ted Koppel. The gentleman from Maryland was very adamant in pressing the Russians on the freedom of the press as a key part of any democracy. In fact, he challenged them on the rumored threats to shut down one of the TV stations and to further censor their media.

Perhaps the gentleman would like to elaborate on that point.

Mr. HOYER. I will take a little more time. I know the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. HOEFFEL) has a meeting to go to, and I want to get to him, but I did have the opportunity to meet with Mr. Kiselov, who, as the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON) pointed out, is sort of our Tom Brokaw, Peter Jennings, Walter Cronkite, and Dan Rather rolled up into one. Media-MOST and NTV is the only independent TV station in Russia. It is funded by, in part at least, by a gentleman named Gusinsky. We urged

the members of the Russian Duma and other officials with whom we met to ensure that they would continue to be free and independent.

It is interesting that Ted Turner, who has so successfully opened up the eyes of the world to other lands through CNN, an extraordinary contribution to the interchange of peoples and the knowledge of one people of another, it is interesting that he has made an offer, along with partners, George Soros and others, to participate at the level of \$30 million in helping to finance this independent TV station. We urged the leaders in Russia to ensure that that station would remain independent, because we know that a democracy cannot flourish without an independent press, without independent criticism, without an independent voice letting the people of that democracy know what their government is doing. If it is only a government-owned station, or if it is only a station owned by an organization like Gasprom, dependent on the government, then it will not be a free and objective voice. It will not be an alternative voice.

So that was one of the issues that we had the opportunity to raise. I know that the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON), who is probably the expert in this Congress on national missile defense, will relate the numerous discussions we had on that issue to ensure that there is not a misunderstanding on either side as to what the objectives are and what the sense of responsibility is with respect to defending our peoples, both in Russia and in the United States, from those who would terrorize our peoples by ballistic missile attacks from a Third World nation.

So the issue of independent media outlets, the issue of defense and security arrangements between our two peoples, were very important issues among many, many others that we raised. I am not going to go into them all, because I know the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON) will as well. But we talked about health issues, we talked about the environment, we talked about fighting drugs, and we talked about confronting terrorists in a cooperative way, because all of those issues were convergent in the best interests of both of our citizenry. Again, the discussions that we have that lead to better understanding and more cooperation will certainly result in a more stable and secure international environment.

Again, I thank the gentleman for allowing me to speak briefly about the importance of NTV and Media-MOST to the growth of the democracy in Russia. I thank the gentleman for yielding to me.

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. I thank my colleague again for stopping by this evening. He is extremely busy.

Joining us from the delegation, Mr. Speaker, among the seven Members of Congress who were with us besides the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER) and the gentleman I am going to introduce next were, on the Republican side, the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. SCHAFFER) and our freshman Republican, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. CRENSHAW). Joining us on the Democrat side were the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. KUCINICH), and also a senior member of the Committee on Appropriations, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR). So it was a strongly bipartisan and well-balanced delegation that gave the people that we met with a complete picture of the political landscape in America.

It was a pleasure to have one of our more junior Members of Congress with us. He is now in his second term. He hit the ground running. It was his first trip to Moscow, and he did the people of Montgomery County well by showing the very positive side of America, yet confronting the Russians where needed as well as the other countries that we visited on the important issues that face our two societies.

I would like now to recognize my colleague, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. HOEFFEL).

Mr. HOEFFEL. I thank the gentleman for yielding to me; and I want to thank my colleague, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON), for his extraordinary leadership in this Congress and on this trip due to his vast knowledge of Russia and the former Soviet Union, the extraordinary contacts he has as a result of those 23 visits. I can report to the House that the gentleman is well known and well regarded among Russian officials, members of the Duma, as well as members of the Putin cabinet and members of the Russian military.

My colleague has devoted years and years to the study of Russia. And with his relationships and in developing relationships with people in Russia, that reflects so well on this Congress and provided such great guidance to us on this trip. And, of course, he will agree that we were blessed to have as a co-chair on the trip the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER), who just spoke, who also has a marvelous background with his many visits to Russia. I cannot imagine a delegation that could possibly be better led than this one led by my colleague, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON), and the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER).

I wanted to thank my colleague for his foresight in establishing with the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER) the Congress-Duma committee. I wanted to say just a few words about how interesting I found this relationship during our visit to Moscow; how useful I found it to be to have an established format and framework in which Members of Congress could talk with Members of the Russian state Duma and

have a very free flow of information and questions back and forth.

In fact, we had that free flow of information. I was able, along with the members of our delegation, to ask some tough questions of our Russian guests regarding, first off, the question of freedom of the press that the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER) has just eloquently addressed. We were able to ask the members of the Duma why this crackdown is occurring against the independent media in Russia. We asked about the background for it, the reasons for it, and we got some mixed results.

Some of the members on the Russian side denied that there was any serious crackdown or infringement of freedom of the press in Russia. That is not the information that we have been given by human rights advocates, by our embassy personnel and by others. We did not resolve this dispute in our discussions, but we had a good opportunity to talk about it and to raise the issue and to make sure that the members of the Duma understand that the Members of Congress are well aware of this issue.

I and other members of the congressional delegation were able to raise questions about legislation the Duma is considering that would restrict religious practices in Russia by regulating organized religion, and legislation that would restrict and limit political parties in Russia. Both of those restrictions are of great concern to those of us in this country who understand how important it is not just to have a free and independent media but also, obviously, to have a free exercise of religion and a political system that allows political parties to organize free of government control.

□ 1515

There is no doubt that while Russia is moving toward a more democratic society, dedicated to free enterprise and the development of free markets, there are still some efforts involved to centralize society and government, efforts that we do not fully support here in this country. We were able to raise these issues with our colleagues from the Russian Duma in a way that I think was very positive. In turn, as the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON) knows, this format gave members of the Duma the opportunity to raise issues with us. I and members of our delegation asked them about the arms transfers to Iran which concerned us. Their reply was that this was an economic matter, that the budget problems they have in Russia leads them to sell their arms technology and the ability to establish nuclear reactors, for example, to Iran to help with their budget problem. And so they asked us, in turn, to help them with their debt, to help the Paris Club of Nations to understand the need to either forgive or restructure some of the Russian debt

that is owed that is a crushing burden on that economy. Much of that debt is Soviet era. Some of that debt is World War II era. The Russians made a good argument for the need for some debt relief. But that, of course, did not change our belief that these arm sales and technology transfers to Iran is not something that we view as simply an economic issue as the Russians do but something that we consider to be a security threat to this country and a political problem for this country that must be addressed and must be changed.

And, of course, the issue that we discussed the most with our Russian hosts was the question of arms control and missile defense. While we did not have a complete meeting of the minds on that issue and while in fact our own delegation had several different views on the question of missile defense in particular, we did have a good discussion which I think would be summarized that the Russian officials as well as the Russian military would like to see continued arms negotiations, bilateral negotiations as opposed to unilateral reductions, because the process of going through bilateral negotiations allows confidence and trust to be developed on both sides and allows the negotiations of verification provisions that would make sure that through inspections and other mechanisms, we can be sure that the reductions in arms that are being negotiated are actually implemented, something that is not available when one country unilaterally cuts its weapons.

On the question of missile defense, the Russians are very alarmed by the possibility that this country will unilaterally deploy a national missile defense. They seem anxious to work with Western nations on the notion of missile defenses. They recognize that the biggest threat to them as the biggest threat to us is the concern about rogue nations, terrorist use of weapons and of course the possibility of accidental launches. I think while we certainly did not come to a meeting of the minds, there is a greater understanding, I think, as a result of this visit regarding the potential for the United States and Russia and our European allies and NATO to work jointly to develop a joint missile defense system that would protect all of the Western democracies and our emerging democracies, such as Russia, against the very real threats that our President has quite rightly pointed out that are posed by rogue nations and others.

I thank the gentleman for this opportunity to speak. I did not mean to talk this long this afternoon, but the gentleman has given me an opportunity to learn a great deal about Russia and the former Soviet Union. It was a fascinating trip. I believe that this kind of travel is very useful for Members of Congress. And when there is an organi-

zation in place, such as the Congress-Duma Committee, it gives a wonderful opportunity for a better understanding between parliamentarians of different countries. I thank the gentleman for the work he has done over the last decade or so here in Congress dealing with Russia, I thank him for his leadership on the trip, and I thank him for his time this afternoon.

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. I thank my colleague for his outstanding contributions to the trip. He was a valuable partner, he was an aggressive representative of the American position, and yet he was open and aware of the need to listen to the Russian-Ukrainian-Moldovan perspective of world issues and the relationship to our relationship with those countries. I thank my colleague for being here this evening.

Mr. Speaker, at this time before I introduce one of my other colleagues who was on the trip, I would like to go through and just highlight the kind of meetings we held and give the overall themes of what the purpose of our trip was all about.

First of all, since we formed the Duma-Congress initiative 7 years ago, I have had two overriding purposes in our relationship with Russia. We tend to want to rely on the Presidents of our two countries to work out our relationship. As we all know, they are the heads of state and they are the ones who set the overall policy. But there is a constructive role for the parliaments to play. There is a very important role that we can do to assist emerging democracies like those we visited. The two overriding purposes I have had in forming the interparliamentary dialogue with the Russians was to empower the parliament to show the emerging Duma and its leaders how they can accomplish the same kinds of checks and balances that we provide in our government here in America. By interacting with committee chairs, by sharing staffs, by having regular meetings on issues that are both common to us like the environment, health care, social issues, economic issues, we also can confront the more difficult issues, strategic issues, defense issues, multilateral relationships. So our overriding purpose is to empower the parliament, make it more of a constructive force in the democracy so it can in fact achieve the same kind of role that our Congress plays in America, one that only makes the democracy in Russia stronger.

The second purpose is to help Russia build a middle class. Because if Russia is to survive over the long haul, we can do all that we want to encourage relationships but we have to help Russia understand what it is going to take to build a middle class. The strength of America is our middle class. I am convinced that what has largely empowered that middle class has been the ability of people to own and buy their

own homes, to own a piece of America, if you will, and what we have been doing for the past 5 years is working with Russia to put into place a mortgage financing system for average Russians. These discussions were a major part of our efforts in Russia. We also had similar discussions in the other countries. So focusing on empowering the parliament and building a middle class, they were the overriding themes of our talks, but we had a wide range of talks.

I think, Mr. Speaker, we took the right approach. In visiting Russia, we did not go over there as if they were our enemy. Unfortunately, the presidential visit that took place last May between President Clinton and President Putin had the two of them come together and focus on things that we totally disagree on; namely, how many missiles should we point at each other. We took the exact opposite approach. The major thrust of our meetings were positive. They were about health care initiatives. They were about environmental initiatives, economic initiatives, technology initiatives, a mortgage system, ways that we could further cooperate and allow Russia to build a stable society and one that is closely interconnected with an American society. That reflects the kinds of meetings that we had.

I mentioned our first meeting was at 12:30 a.m. on Monday morning when we arrived and our plane was late, we drove to the hotel and there in our hotel in downtown Moscow was the Deputy Minister of Housing and Construction Mr. Ponomorof waiting for us. And so the Members of Congress, even though they had been flying for over 24 straight hours, sat up for another hour until 1:30 in the morning and had our first meeting.

On Monday morning, we arose at 8 a.m. and we had meetings with the deputy minister of the economy, the housing minister for all of Russia and the finance minister. We met with our Ambassador, Jim Collins, to get a briefing from the State Department there. For lunch we were hosted by the American business leaders, the executives of American companies who have set up operations throughout Russia, and we heard from them about what we should be doing to better improve the relationship economically between Russia and America. We then traveled to a hospital on the outskirts of Moscow, Hospital No. 7. We were joined by representatives of cancer institutes in America who had flown over separately from the Fox Chase Cancer Center and from the National Cancer Institutes, we took a delegation and traveled out to the largest hospital in Moscow, a 1,500-bed hospital that focuses on cancer and cancer research. Right adjacent to this hospital is the Blokhin Cancer Center. Our purpose was to build on a memorandum of understanding that

had been signed 2 weeks earlier by the Russian and American Cancer Research Centers. So our first serious meeting outside of the government was with ties to establish closer relations between our health care system.

After the meeting at Hospital No. 7, we went to the Nuclear Safety Institute, where again we ceremoniously signed memorandums of understanding that were agreed upon by our Department of Energy earlier to establish joint projects between the Kurchatov Institute, an institute in downtown Moscow, and the Nuclear Safety Institute, to bring our two countries closer together to protect the people in both countries from the threat of nuclear problems, the theft of nuclear material, the disintegration of nuclear material, the illegal dumping of nuclear waste and establishing a new framework of cooperation.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, one of the most interesting discussions on the trip was with our Russian counterparts who floated the idea that perhaps we can create a new way of disposing or actually storing our spent nuclear fuel.

As we all know, Mr. Speaker, in America, Yucca Mountain is very controversial, which is the site where we would ultimately store our spent nuclear waste. What the Russians are beginning to talk about is America and Russia joining together and having a common site, probably in Siberia or in the Ural Mountains that would be managed by an international organization where America and Russia together would store their spent nuclear fuel so that we could work together on research over the next several decades of how to eliminate that spent nuclear fuel and how to develop new peaceful solutions and new peaceful uses of spent nuclear fuel, an interesting concept that we invited the Russians to come back to us with some specific ideas on.

With Kurchatov we continued our discussions about cooperation, in particular some measures of providing a new form of energy that could be floated on barges involving nuclear power plants, to assist where there are energy shortfalls like that that we have just seen experienced in California.

Our final major event on Monday was a dinner hosted by the executives of UKOS Oil Company, the second largest oil company in Russia, and there we talked about economic interaction, we talked about ways that American companies can more aggressively engage with the energy giants that are developing inside of Russia. As President Bush outlined to us last night, that developing an national energy strategy is critically important, our goal was to see whether or not Russia can become a key strategic ally in terms of offering us other energy resources.

On Tuesday at 8 a.m. we started our meetings with the Ministry of Atomic

Energy. Minister Adamov hosted us for an hour. We discussed the broad range of nuclear issues involving both Russia and America. There are productive opportunities that are arising from that meeting. I will outline them in more detail in a report that I will file.

The rest of Tuesday was spent in the Duma. We met with the Deputy Speaker, all the factional leaders and the major committees in the Duma, including international affairs, foreign affairs, housing and mortgages, ecology, all the major interest areas in the Russian Duma that we could work together on. In fact, a part of our meeting with the Ecology Committee of the Duma, which is chaired by Chairman Grachev, was to sign an agreement to assist the Russians in building a cooperative effort to deal with their environmental issues and concerns. Working with a London-based group, the Advisory Council on Protecting the Seas, over the past 4 years, Russia has developed a strategy to begin to address its environmental concerns. At our meeting with Chairman Grachev, we affirmed our support to help Russia through the U.N. acquire the money to implement that environmental plan of action.

Also on Tuesday, we had a dinner with the Moscow Petroleum Club. Former Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, former Ambassador to the U.S. Yuli Vorontsov, our Ambassador and a host of other dignitaries joined us for a solid evening of both social interaction and, more importantly, constructive dialogue about U.S.-Russian relations.

On Wednesday we traveled to Moldova. In Moldova the delegation met individually with all the senior leaders of the Moldovan government, the President, the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, the Speaker of the Parliament and we met with the parliamentary members themselves, including the Communist faction.

□ 1530

Now when we arrived in Moldova, they were controlled by a western faction. Unfortunately, two days later, Moldova's parliamentary elections turned the control over to the communists who now control 71 percent of the Moldovan parliament.

One of our prime purposes in going to Moldova was to establish a new interparliamentary linkage between the Moldovan parliament and the U.S. Congress. Chairing the American side of that interparliamentary linkage is the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. PITTS) and the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. KUCINICH).

At this point in time, Mr. Speaker, I would like to turn to my colleague, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. KUCINICH), who is the co-chair of the Moldovan American Interparliamentary Assembly, who was on the trip, for his comments both about Moldova and more

broadly about the trip in general. So I yield to my good friend, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. KUCINICH).

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON) for yielding. I want to thank the gentleman for his outstanding leadership in reaching out to people in Russia and the Ukraine, Moldova and throughout Europe. I think that I can speak for everyone on the trip in saying that we believe that the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON) has brought a level of stature to his position as a Member of Congress where one can see the respect with which he is held by leaders of all the nations who have met with him many times concerning their movement towards democratization. So I can say what an honor it was for me to be on the trip and to share in the dedication of the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON), and his knowledge and his passion for bringing people together, particularly at a parliamentary level.

Since the gentleman left off mentioning with Moldova, we went to Moldova in the hope of encouraging the rule of law, democratic order, market economy and as the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON) may have recounted or has been recounted early, Moldova made a choice a few days ago for the Communist Party to be involved in the organization of its government and actually direct the organization of its government.

The notes that I have from the meeting indicate that the leader of the party in Moldova stated that they appreciated the contacts with the U.S. Congress and they look for those contacts to become stronger and that they respect the United States as a world power and they hope that our government will work with them and respect the choices that have been made by the people and that they hoped that the relations will develop between the U.S. Congress and the Moldovan government. This was done, of course, prospectively because as it turns out Moldova did vote for the Communist Party.

The gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON) and members of our delegation actually laid the groundwork for a dialogue with a government which now may have a totally different perspective than we do about how things should be done, but at least we are in a position where we can be talking.

Furthermore, the opening that made with Russia, we had, I thought, very important discussions with parliamentarians about issues of financial aid and the International Monetary Fund, the need for further economic reforms, discussions about privatization, discussions about the role of NATO, which a number of parliamentarians were concerned about, the bombing of Serbia, which, by the way, it was almost 2

years ago that the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON) led a delegation to Vienna, which I was privileged to participate in, that created a framework for ending the bombing in Serbia. Actually, as we met with the members of the Russian parliament there, we created more of a structure for increased exchange and confidence building, and I thought that was very important.

In our discussions with Lubov Sliska, who was the first deputy of the Duma, she pointed out how important it was to have productive discussions with NATO; that she wanted to see trade and economic growth emphasized in our relations, agriculture, energy, foreign affairs, internal security, defense and disarmament, cooperation on crime investigations, culture and health.

Our meeting with Sergey Kiriyenko, who was at one time the prime minister of Russia and is now one of the super governors appointed by President Putin, I thought was very productive. He pointed out among other things how grave is the threat of chemical weapons. They have 40,000 tons of chemical weapons they want to dispose of, and how he had hoped we could bring a level of cooperation through parliamentary contact to help raise the issue of these chemical weapons, increase the awareness of the need for U.S. and Russian cooperation, sponsor colloquia in the U.S. Congress on this; that we as Members of Congress could write letters to our fellows urging them to get involved; sign a letter to the President talking about the need to do something about these chemical weapons and to generally pursue a course that would enable Russia to get some assistance on trying to dispense with this.

One final comment, if I may, I think our visit to Ukraine was momentous because we were able to get the Kuchma administration to recognize how serious our commitment is to freedom of press, freedom of speech and freedom of assembly in this country. We take it quite seriously.

In an unprecedented 2 hour and 15 minute meeting with the President of Ukraine, we got him to agree to an F.B.I. independent investigation and assistance on the forensics of a case that involves the murder of a journalist, H.E. Khandogiy, whose death has unfortunately been linked to people in power in Ukraine.

So what we did on our trip was to affirm support for democratization; was to show people all over the world that they can benefit by taking a course of market economics that are tempered by respecting the systems of power that exist in a country. One of the things that I thought was quite telling that was said by Mr. Kiriyenko, and I would like to close with this thought, is the importance of paying attention

to people and developing people. He said that in the future we will compete not just with price or quality but with respect to who will be first to introduce innovation.

He spoke of the significance of human capital, people, investing in people. He said this is not just a financial issue, it is not a technical issue, it is a problem of culture, and it is not incidental that we talk of culture. He talked of the importance of us learning other cultures, the importance of us understanding the results of culture and transitional economies, and I think that message that we bring back here is one that shows that we as Members of Congress can help to improve exchanges with other parliamentarians around the world, can be vessels for freedom and justice and can continue the work of this country as being the light of the world.

I thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON) for his indulgence here, and I thank him for giving me the privilege of assisting him and other Members, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) and others of the delegation, in this very important mission.

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. I want to thank my friend and colleague, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. KUCINICH) for his remarks. He played an absolutely unbelievable role in this trip. He has kicked off, along with the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. PITTS), a new initiative with the Moldovan parliament. Nothing could be more important right now because of Moldova's strategic location, because of Moldova's issues. Part of our visit to Moldova, besides the formal meeting, included a trip to Trans-Dniester, which is an independent enclave where the 14th Army Division of the Russian military is still located. In fact, there are so many units there that we were told it would take days and days and over a year, if you had four train loads a day hauling armaments out of Moldova it would be over a year and you still would not have removed all of the 14th Army Division. So we traveled up there, and we met with someone who calls himself President, the leader of this breakaway public, Mr. Smirnov, and the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. KUCINICH) joined us in a dialogue with this breakaway group saying it is important that you reunify with Moldova and the West and the U.S. wants to help you.

We also visited a collective farm or a former collective farm on perhaps one of our most emotional visits on the trip to see young children and adults who have been given the opportunity to take over the land that used to be owned by the state and now own it privately; to see the pride in their faces as they stood up before us and they told their personal stories of having taken back land that their grandfathers and grandmothers had had decades ago that

now is controlled by them; and the products they are producing with no pesticides, no fertilizers, organic farming at its best. This is a part of the Moldovan experience, and the groundwork we laid will allow our Congress to play an integral role with this new communist-controlled parliament which won the elections in Moldova this past Monday.

So I would say to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. KUCINICH), he was a very important addition to the trip and we thank him. It was really good because all of them got to see that in America there are two sides on missile defense. Every time I would give one position, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. KUCINICH) would give the other. We said that is healthy, that is America. It was a good dialogue, and I thank the gentleman for being with us on the trip.

Mr. KUCINICH. I thank the gentleman.

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. The other important part of our trip, Mr. Speaker, was Ukraine. Arriving in Ukraine 3 days ahead of us, after having left us in Moscow, were our two Members of Congress who know the most about Ukraine. In fact, they are both of Ukrainian ancestry. They are the new cochairs of the Ukrainian Rada American Congress initiative coming together on behalf of our two countries. The gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) has traveled to Ukraine a number of times. She has been out on the farms, outside of the big cities, looking for strategies to help the Ukrainian people.

She is our Democrat co-chair. The gentleman from Colorado (Mr. SCHAFER) is our Republican co-chair. The gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is just the person to talk to when it comes to that part of the world, and if anyone wants to know anything about Ukraine, they cannot know anything without talking to the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR). So our good friend and colleague on the trip and leader in the Congress, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR).

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my good friend and most able colleague, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON), for arranging for this special order. I wanted to publicly acknowledge the incredibly important role he is playing in helping to build bridges to nations that were our former enemies. I think as history is written, as surely it will be, and we look back at the challenge to building the peace as opposed to only fighting either hot or cold wars, the role of the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON) will be absolutely essential and recognized, and I hope the American people as they listen to this special order today will understand that it is in America's interest to build functioning democracies in that part of the

world; that we cannot afford to ignore the millions and millions of people that live there and still need to learn about the institutions of freedom, certainly in the management of their own instruments of governance. The gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON) has been the leader in establishing the Congressional Duma exchange in Russia.

For the last 8 years, sometimes I am sure it was a lonely task trying to make friendships with people who had just recently been some of our most harsh critics and bitter enemies, and yet the gentleman has pursued this year after year after year. To me, that is the test of true leadership, and I wanted to say that.

I hope the gentleman's constituents are listening to this. I hope the American people are listening because truly we have to figure out how to build a peace that will last, and it can only come through communication with the leaders of those countries and with the people institution of those countries.

In the brief time I have to say something tonight, I also wanted to acknowledge, in terms of Ukraine, the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. SCHAFER), who is our partner in this effort, Republican and Democrat working together on behalf of the interests of freedom, in signing the agreement that we would like to submit to the RECORD this evening for the new Congressional Rada exchange for Ukraine.

It is modeled on the impressive work that the gentleman has done, along with the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER), in Russia for these past several years. We have a lot of work to do in Ukraine and we arrived at a most delicate moment, and I will say a word about that in a second. But I wanted to say to my colleagues here this evening, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. CRENSHAW), what a great thrill it was for me to be able to travel with him, with his wife; the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. HOEFFEL); the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. KUCINICH), who was with us a little earlier this evening; and the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER); and certainly the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. PITTS), who has a major responsibility on the Moldovan Parliamentary Exchange.

To be there particularly at this time and to experience the ambassadors' wisdom really, the ambassador of the United States to Russia, Mr. James Collins, the ambassador from the United States to Ukraine, Ambassador Carlos Pascual. Honestly, they are among the most able citizens that we could send into that most complex part of the world.

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As an American, I was just very proud to be there and to be able to listen to them and to learn from them,

and to have their help in meeting the people that we needed to in those countries.

At the urging of the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON), several of us attempted to put the beginnings of an agreement on housing, helping Russia to begin, begin the first mortgage system. It will not be easy. It is a vast country with 13 time zones, no sense of free enterprise, no institutions in place, either financial or in terms of the substantive work that needs to be done to create a mortgage system based on collateral, including land. There is no system of collateralizing land to borrow against.

But America must help in this endeavor. We cannot be like ostriches with our heads in the ground. We have to use the instruments of freedom, all the institutions we have available to us, to try at this moment in history to make a difference.

I want to thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania for leading us down that path, recognizing that community development is an equal partner, along with a strong defense, in order to help nations remain at peace.

In terms of Ukraine, I just wanted to say that we arrived at a time when the President of the country obviously is under extreme duress. There are charges and countercharges, and the institutions of that country are not strong enough to conduct a full and thorough investigation of the actual criminal acts that were involved in the beheading of a very well known journalist in that country who had been a critic of many aspects of the current government.

I wish to submit to the RECORD also this evening the press statement that all of us created in Ukraine and released to the international press encouraging that there be a full investigation, and in fact, even engaging other partners from the West, from Europe, from the United States, in trying to get at the true facts in this case.

The press statement referred to is as follows:

U.S. DELEGATION CONDUCTS WHIRLWIND FACT-FINDING VISIT OF RUSSIA, MOLDOVA AND UKRAINE

DELEGATION URGES PEACEFUL, DEMOCRATIC RESOLUTION TO CURRENT CRISIS; DELEGATION ESTABLISHES HISTORIC U.S. CONGRESS-VERKHOVENA RADA PARLIAMENTARY EXCHANGE

A Congressional delegation of seven members of the U.S. Congress led by the Honorable Curt Weldon (R-PA) is completing a three-nation visit including Russia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The purpose of this visit was to continue the relationships established seven years ago between the United States House of Representatives and the Russian Duma, and to establish similar relationships with the parliaments of Moldova and Ukraine. The other members of the delegation include: Representative Steny Hoyer (D-MD), Representative Marcy Kaptur (D-OH), Representative Bob Schaffer (R-CO), Representative Dennis Kucinich (D-OH),

Representative Joe Hoeffel (D-PA), and Representative Ander Crenshaw (R-FL).

The Congressional delegation participated in over 40 scheduled meetings in the three countries that included meeting with the Presidents of Moldova and Ukraine, as well as the leadership of the parliaments, senior civilian cabinet level officials and military leaders in all three countries. In Russia and Ukraine, the delegation met with prominent media figures concerned with press freedoms in their respective countries.

While meeting with President Leonid Kuchma and other officials in Kyiv, the delegation expressed its serious concerns with the Heorhiy Gongadze incident, and believes the subsequent investigation must be pursued irrespective of where it may lead. That pursuit must be compatible with the following principals: The freedom of speech, press, and assembly; the rule of law; and nonviolence.

The delegation believes that any settlement of the Gongadze crisis not taking the above points into account would adversely affect future Ukrainian/American relations.

The delegation also: Extends its sincere sympathy to the families and associates of Mr. Gongadze; reiterates the offer of technical support from the Federal Bureau of Investigation; expresses its strong belief and insistence that a credible and independent investigation is essential in order to earn the confidence of Ukraine and the rest of the world community; affirms the principle that those accused must be considered innocent until proven guilty; and intends to introduce a resolution in the House of Representatives to express the sense of Congress that this incident should be resolved peacefully.

During the over two hour meeting with President Kuchma, the delegation was gratified to receive the commitment of the President to follow the rule of law, maintain the freedom of the press and assembly, and to use restraint in the use of force.

U.S. CONGRESS-RADA PARLIAMENTARY EXCHANGE

We, the undersigned members of the United States House of Representatives and members of the Parliament of Ukraine, do hereby establish the U.S. Congress-Rada Parliamentary Exchange (further referred to as CRPE), for the purpose of facilitating expanded strategic relations between the United States and Ukraine.

The purpose of CRPE is to foster closer relations between our two legislatures to address key bilateral issues. It is the goal of the CRPE Parliament to examine issues of mutual understanding and continue a constructive dialogue toward permanent peace and prosperity.

Having reviewed the work of the initial congressional delegation to Ukraine in November 1999, which participated in discussions of mutual interest in trade, economic well-being, energy reformation, agriculture, and military relations, CRPE will promote closer relationships between the lawmakers of both countries.

Building upon the strategic partnership between the United States and Ukraine first established in 1996, the CRPE shall serve as a conduit in further developing and continuing economic and political cooperation between the two countries.

Now, be it resolved by affirmation of the undersigned Members of the House of Representatives, with the support of the Congressional Ukrainian Caucus, and the Parliamentarians of the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada there is hereby established, the U.S. Congress-Rada Parliamentary Exchange. Be it further resolved, the Exchange shall:

(1) Constitute a working group to help resolve any issues hampering an expansion of economic and political cooperation between the United States and Ukraine; and,

(2) Establish items of discussion by the CRPE which encompass economic relations, trade, space exploration, health-care, the environment, agriculture, natural resources, and any other matter important to the promotion of close ties between the United States and Ukraine; and,

(3) Convene bi-annually in the United States and Ukraine to formally exchange viewpoints brought about by current events. The CRPE will from time to time issue recommendations to be pursued in each legislature.

The founders of the CRPE hereby acknowledge the leaders of the Congress of the United States, in coordination with the Congressional Ukrainian Caucus, and the Parliament of Ukraine, for their dedication to establishing the Exchange.

Signed at Washington, D.C. November 18, 1999 by: Hon. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Signed at Kyiv, on November 30, 1999 by: Hon. Oleksander Tkachenko, Speaker of the Ukrainian Parliament.

Ms. KAPTUR. Also to that country, we would urge Ukraine to follow the principles of freedom of speech, press, assembly, the rule of law, and nonviolence. We want to walk alongside them. As they get through this particular crisis, we know their country will be stronger, just as ours will be stronger as a result of the crises that we have been through.

We expressed our deep regrets to the families who are so troubled by the disappearance of Mr. Gongadze, and we also reiterated and believe that in the meeting with the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON) and President Kuchma, we got the first commitment of an agreement from the Ukrainian government to use resources in the West to help get at the bottom of what actually created the crime.

We urge the government of Ukraine to use us. We believe that the confidence of the people of Ukraine and the West depends on a fair and thorough investigation of the facts. We are going to be introducing a resolution here in the House to express the sense that this Congress wants this incident resolved peacefully.

So I wanted to say to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON) for the record this evening. I just again want to thank the gentleman so very much for the gentleman's international leadership in bringing this all together and doing what is historically correct and imperative for peace in this new millennium.

Mr. Speaker, I also include for the RECORD an article that relates to Russia and some of the difficulties that church-related organizations are having in accessing properties.

The article referred to is as follows:

ICE CURTAIN IN THE EAST

(By Geraldine Fagan)

On 7 January, Russia's Orthodox Church celebrated the two-thousandth anniversary

of the birth of Christ. Thousands attended the Christmas liturgy in Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, triumphantly, and, many have averred, tastelessly, restored to the city's skyline more than 60 years after Stalin ordered its obliteration from it. Live coverage of the event was marred, however, when Patriarch Alexis II arrived more than an hour late, delayed by his participation in the day's informal meetings between President Putin and the German Chancellor, Gerhard Schroder. As the television cameras panned in on the massed faithful awaiting their Patriarch, they picked out the emerald robes of seemingly the most senior cleric in attendance—Mufti Talgat Tadzhuiddin, head of Russia's Central Spiritual Directorate of Muslims. For the third year running, the chief representative of Russia's Roman Catholics, Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, had not been invited.

Catholic-Orthodox relations in Russia remain poor. The Moscow Patriarchate's frequent complaints that the Catholic Church is engaging in rampant proselytism translate into a state policy of containment. In Moscow, there are 27 Masses in more than 10 languages every Sunday—almost all of which take place under two roofs. Attempts to reclaim the third historically Catholic building of the church of SS Peter and Paul in order to relieve the strain have been fruitless. When Cardinal Angelo Sodano acting as papal legate made a request to Mayor Luzhkov's office for three plots of land to build chapels in lieu of the return of the church of SS Peter and Paul, he reportedly received a strong and swift rejection.

According to one Catholic source in Moscow, the Catholic Church has agreed not to create any new institutions or structures in the city, so that the number of legally registered parishes totals five. The remainder—including those which group Filipinos, Latin Americans, Koreans and Iraqis—are either termed "pastoral points" in an official directory of the Catholic Church in Russia for the year 2000, or else are not listed at all. In addition, the two apostolic administrations ("diocese" would be too provocative a term) of southern European Russia and eastern Siberia have been denied registration because they are headed by foreigners. Bishop Jerzy Mazur, a Pole, and Bishop Clemens Pickel, a German, have been told that they will be granted Russian citizenship only if they marry a Russian, and currently have to pass any noninternal documentation—such as invitations for visiting foreign clergy—to their counterparts with legal status in Moscow or Novosibirsk. By contrast, the American-born Berl Lazar, the Kremlin's preferred choice as chief rabbi over Adolf Shayevich, who is backed by the industrialist and oligarch Vladimir Gusinsky, faced no obstruction in obtaining Russian citizenship.

The chancellor of the Moscow-based European Apostolic Administration, the Catholic priest Fr Igor Kovalevsky, insists that the Catholic Church in Russia "is just trying to function normally and provide for its minority here. We are not posing any competition at all." With 60 per cent of the Russian population claiming to be Orthodox, and the Catholic Church bending over backwards to keep to its own while simultaneously supporting the Orthodox through foundations such as Aid to the Church in Need, it is intended difficult to see why the Catholic minority of approximately 500,000 is subject to so much hostility.

Orthodox fears of competition appear more realistic, however, when one takes into account the fact that so few Russians are truly

touched by Orthodoxy. Where they have a presence, Catholics might constitute 1 per cent of the population, with practising Orthodox making up another 3 per cent. In addition, the concentration of Orthodox parishes is such that 8,450, or almost half, are situated not in Russia, but in the west in Ukraine. The vast area of Siberia east of the Yenisei River, by contrast, contains approximately 500 parishes. The Orthodox Church's current total of 19,000 parishes is still only a fraction of the 78,000 it had before the Revolution, and the euphoria of the early 1990s when many new believers were received is a thing of the past.

Does this mean that the much-vaunted revival of Orthodoxy in Russia is a fiction? Many Western commentators have looked for it in vain, expecting a healthy revival to exhibit certain characteristics, such as social work, a desire for ecumenical dialogue or a move towards modernising liturgical language. By contrast, they have seen a rise in nationalism within the Church coupled with virulent anti-Catholicism.

If one can speak of a revival, it does not exhibit those characteristics sought for by Western Christians. There is a core of sincere, sober-minded practising Orthodox in Russia devoted to their Church, but they tend to concentrate upon the vertical aspects of church life. Asked whether there had been an Orthodox revival in Russia, one young parishioner told me that it was difficult to know what such a revival would be like from the point of view of the New Testament, since "God's kingdom is not of this world". In the light of such sentiments, it is perhaps easier to understand why one of the strongest elements of revival is not in the social sphere, but monasticism. Compared with their Christian counterparts in western Europe, however, practising Orthodox are stronger within sections of society such as academia and youth, where they tend to enjoy the respect of their non-believing peers rather than experiencing their skepticism.

Nationalist feeling among these practising Orthodox, however, remains passive. Nationalists prefer to parade on the streets with banners rather than attend church, and, as before the Revolution, only a tiny minority of Orthodox monarchists belong to the virulently nationalist Black Hundreds movement. There are in any case two forms of nationalism in Russia—Stalinist and pre-revolutionary. Most nationalists belong in the first category and are indifferent to religion. This does not stop them from being opposed to the institution of the Catholic Church, however, since there is a general perception that it belongs to an organised anti-Russian force, and all Russians were taught in school that Catholics were crusaders from the Baltics repelled by the national hero Alexander Nevsky.

Although punching above their weight, practising Orthodox in favour of ecumenical dialogue are indeed very few. In the Soviet era, the pro-ecumenical element within the Church gained an artificial influence because of its usefulness to the foreign policy aims of the regime, and precisely for that reason is now frequently viewed with derision by post-revival practising believers. For most Orthodox, ecumenical dialogue with Catholics (and others) is impossible for a simple reason—they are heretics. To Russian Orthodox, however, this does not necessarily conjure up emotive images of burnings at the stake: one parishioner matter-of-factly explained to me that the word "heresy" merely derives from the Greek for "opinion"; that is, anything deviating from Orthodox tradition is the

product of the mistaken human notion that this tradition could be improved upon.

In one Moscow parish I recently heard a sermon in which the priest likened Orthodoxy to the calculation $2 \times 2 = 4$. At some stage, he said, Catholics (and others) decided that in fact it would be more accurate to say $2 \times 2 = 4.000025$. "You can build a chair with those people using their calculations and it will turn out all right", he explained to the congregation, "but if you both build spaceships and set your course on a far-off planet, their spaceship will end up somewhere else". The Catholic concept promoted by Pope John Paul II of a Europe breathing with two lungs, East and West, is not theologically possible for Orthodox in Russia. No amount of sensitive diplomacy and donations of floating churches from Catholics will change that.

There are signs, however, that the Vatican might be becoming wise to all this. The passivity towards Orthodox criticism throughout the past decade in Russia, culminating in intense diplomatic efforts to bring the Pope here in the symbolic year of 2000, has brought few returns. In the light of this, it is of some significance that the recently returned and restored Church of the Immaculate Conception in Moscow is now openly referred to as a cathedral. Of much greater import is the planned papal visit to predominantly Orthodox Ukraine, set up without the agreement of the leader of the only officially-recognised Orthodox Church in that country—the one that gives allegiance to the Moscow Patriarchate. It looks as if Catholic-Russian Orthodox relations might be about to become stormier, if also more open.

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Ohio. We all have a very valued possession in this Congress with the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR), who is an outstanding leader, commands respect wherever she goes, and always presents a nonpartisan view in terms of improving relations.

The gentlewoman's leadership as a senior member of the Committee on Appropriations, a specialist on agriculture issues, on economic development and empowerment issues, is known throughout the world, especially in Ukraine and now in Russia. We appreciate that.

I look forward to working with the gentlewoman and our good friend, the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. SCHAFER), in helping Ukraine become a key ally of the U.S. over the next several years.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. CRENSHAW), our freshman member of the delegation, an outstanding Member. He was involved, engaged, and he played a very vital role. We look to him to provide that freshman leadership in showing other colleagues of ours that are new to Congress that they can play a very constructive role in helping to make the world a safer place.

Mr. CRENSHAW. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania for the privilege to travel with him. As a freshman, as the gentleman points out, it was remarkable to me to know and understand first-hand some

of the problems in that region, and as a new member of the Committee on Armed Services, I think it is going to be even more valuable.

I would just like to make a couple of observations that really hit home to me, particularly in Russia. It was a grueling trip, with 40 meetings in six cities and 23 meetings in Moscow, but I came away with such a unique understanding of that region of the world. I think there is no better way, if we are going to develop a lasting peace, than for people to talk to people and get to know and understand each other.

But as I observed from just a political standpoint, it was so encouraging to me to see that Russia is moving in the right direction. They have opened their society. There is freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, freedom of the press. They are establishing a rule of law.

But I think it was particularly important for us to be there at that time, because as crises occur, there is always that chance that we can move forward and become more open, or move backwards and become oppressive and regressive.

I was encouraged to see things moving in the right direction from a political standpoint. The rule of law seems to be taking place. Property rights are being established. We were instrumental in trying to encourage the use of mortgages as people borrow money to try to own their own property.

From an economic standpoint, I was particularly pleased to see that last year their economy grew about 7 percent, investment was up 15 to 17 percent, so that is all encouraging. I think that has a lot to do with the political stability that is coming into play.

But as the gentleman and I know, how important that economic engine becomes. I was astounded to learn that while the economy is growing, it is relatively small by world standards, in the neighborhood of \$30 billion, when that is half of what the State of Florida is. So they have a long way to go, but they are moving in the right direction.

Finally, as we visited, it was encouraging to me to see from a security standpoint that they are taking steps in the right direction: reducing their military, dealing with us in ways to solve their biological and chemical weapons problem. I guess the jury is still out on that.

But the message we took is when we talk about national missile defense, we want to work together; they are no longer our enemy, that the Cold War is over. Yet, it is still not a safe place to live. There are rogue nations, there is nuclear proliferation. I hope they will continue the dialogue with us that we began so we can work together for a long and lasting peace.

Again, I say to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON), I want to

thank him as a freshman here for that incredible opportunity to begin to understand and now to work as a member of the Committee on Armed Services to try to make this a safer place for everyone.

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I thank our colleague. The people of Florida have sent us a great one. He is going to be a star in this body. We can already see it in the way he handled himself and the way he conducted himself in meeting with these foreign leaders. I thank the gentleman for his great leadership, and for what I know is going to be a very effective role in this Congress during his long tenure here.

Mr. Speaker, there it is, a summary of our trip. We are proud of what we did. We have no apologies to make: 41 meetings in five days in three different States, a number of cities, visits with the people on collective farms, in hospitals, going out and having dinner with ordinary people and future and emerging leaders, all of it designed to build better relations between America and the emerging former Soviet states.

I want to close, Mr. Speaker, with a brief outline of a meeting that I had with General Kavshnin. General Kavshnin is the equivalent to our General Shelton. The meeting was supposed to last for 30 minutes. He had all of his generals lined up there together across the table. We sat there for over 2 hours, a very animated discussion about where Russia is, the strength of the Russian military, the recent military exercise they were involved in, and what his vision of an American-Russian relationship will be in the future.

I will be candid, it was not the most warm discussion of our trip, but it was a candid discussion of Russia's concerns. We reassured him that America is not trying to drive Russia into the corner. To the contrary, we do not want Russia aligned more closely with China against us. We challenged General Kavshnin, based on discussions I had before going on the trip with Secretary of Defense Don Rumsfeld, who I have the highest respect for, and the general in charge of our missile defense organization, General Kadish, who I have equal praise for.

Their challenge from me to the Russians was: We are waiting for your response, Russia, to work together. That was the message we carried throughout our trip: We are waiting for you, Russia, to come back and tell us how we can work together on defending our people, the European people, and the Russian people from the threat of rogue states, states that do not abide by the norms.

In that meeting with General Kavshnin, we opened the door for further dialogue.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we were disappointed with one aspect of the trip:

We did not get to meet President Putin. We had had a commitment before we left that we would meet with him. We were told when we arrived that, because of the bombing of Iraq, he would not meet with us. It was disappointing, because I had been on Air Force One the previous Tuesday, I had told President Bush of our trip to Russia, and he said to me, Congressman, make sure you tell President Putin and the Russians that we want to be their friends. We have no quarrel with the Russians. We want to work together.

That was the message, Mr. Speaker, that I wanted to deliver to Mr. Putin personally with our delegation. We were not able to do that. Otherwise, the trip was a resounding success. I thank my colleagues for participating.

INTRODUCTION OF H.R. 775, THE VOTING IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2001

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. HORN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. HORN. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join today with our colleague, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER), and others in introducing the Voting Improvement Act of 2001, H.R. 775, as we will call it.

The past election produced a great deal of confusion, turmoil, and uncertainty. Although there were a number of factors in producing that confusion, one major factor in Florida and other States was the continuing use of outdated and even antiquated punch card voting systems.

The bill we are introducing today tackles this problem immediately and directly by establishing a grant program for the States to replace all punch card systems before the next Federal election in 2002. In short, this bill provides a practical solution for solving some of the more troublesome voting equipment problems.

As the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER) has noted in introducing the bill, punch card systems have the highest rate of error among all voting methods. One study by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the California Institute of Technology recently estimated that the nationwide error rate for punch cards is 2½ percent, and in a national election that would mean that nearly 1 million votes are thrown out and never counted due to mistakes caused by punch card systems. Clearly, we need to make replacements of these antiquated systems a very high priority.

In addition to immediate equipment replacement, this bill establishes an ongoing grant program to assure that new voting systems are developed and deployed so that voters have up-to-date systems in the future.

The bill also assures that voter education and training of poll workers are

given increased attention and support, and H.R. 775 establishes a permanent bipartisan commission to act as a nationwide resource for information gathering and studying the best practices for ballot design and other basic election needs.

Mr. Speaker, the Voting Improvement Act is one of several proposals being introduced for overhauling our election laws and making certain that we never repeat the chaos of the past election. All of these demand careful review and the development of a bipartisan consensus for sound reform. This bill sets clear priorities and offers practical solutions that must be part of any final reform plan.

I urge our colleagues to join us in this effort in backing H.R. 775.

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REFORM EDUCATION IN AMERICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2001, the gentleman from New York (Mr. OWENS) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. OWENS. Mr. Speaker, in the President's address last night he reaffirmed the fact that education is one of his top priorities. It appears from the speech that the President made that the only priority which ranks above education is the tax cut that is being proposed.

I salute the President for his selection and for his devotion and dedication to education as the number one priority. I think it is very important that he has taken note of the fact that this has been the priority of the American people for the last 4 years or 5 years.

Education has ranked as either the number one priority or somewhere in the top two or three priorities for the last 5 years. So the President is acknowledging the fact that in a democracy, the directions really come from the bottom.

He is not alone. The previous President chose to call himself the Education President, President Clinton. At one point he said he wanted to be the Education President. And he and the younger Mr. Bush are not the only ones.

Father Bush, I think, first coined the phrase Education President. The father of the present President said he wanted to be the Education President.

Before that, Ronald Reagan launched the movement to reform education in America with a report called *A Nation At Risk, A Nation At Risk*. We are now in our fourth President who has chosen to make education a number one priority. We should be making some tremendous progress in terms of the improvement of education in our Nation.

I regretfully report, however, that this is not the case. Despite the fact