

took down the power lines along this road on one side, clipping them off about two feet or so above, taking the entire lines and the power poles across into the woods on the other side.

□ 1815

Then as it crossed that street, just immediately across almost an idyllic setting that I described where the rodeo took place and the ballpark is, here was this recreational vehicle park where people come with their RVs, these big RVs, and they were shredded, they were torn apart, just like many mobile home communities in the area were. People say things looked like match boxes. That is not an adequate description. Trees were shredded like a shredder shreds them at the top. Destruction of these vehicles as well as many of the homes in the area were terribly devastated, indescribable, even though one may see pictures of them, to see what has actually happened in this setting.

The bad news was that 10 people or so were killed in that recreational vehicle park. Over in a neighborhood a short distance away from that of regular single-family homes, there was the same type of destruction I had seen from the air after Hurricane Andrew, a narrower swath but very similar where the homes were literally destroyed. These were well-built, modern homes and people lost everything. Some people lost their lives. Not far from there, there was a strip mall shopping center with a grocery store, with a McDonald's, with a lot of other things in it totally wiped out.

Fortunately, the tornado occurred at night and so the devastation of all of this block and concrete that came down did not kill anyone in that mall other than I understand two people in a pub that was still open that night in the area. A mobile home park wiped out with a lot more people killed. In Orange County, I talked to a couple in a mobile home park where the devastation was terrible, another park near Winter Garden. They had been very fortunate. Nothing had happened to their mobile home. The inside had not been damaged, nothing had fallen off the shelves. But you walked right outside to their carport and the cars under that carport, which was no longer there, had been crushed, a large Ford vehicle whose axle and frame just bent over like some giant block had been set on top of it and immediately next door to them, which was in a mobile home park only a very short distance of a few feet, was another mobile home that had been shredded apart, just totally destroyed and a body had been flung in there from a mobile home 5 or 6 homes down from them where this horrible wreaking had come through but God for whatever reason had spared them and their mobile home but not someone else.

I just want to say that all of the people who have helped in that, all the compassionate workers need to be

thanked, all the people whose outpouring of sympathy and concern have been given and the hours and hours of work that were put in in the aftermath of that storm deserve a lot of thanks and praise. Thank God more people were not killed.

EDUCATION, TAXES AND RETIREMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. Northup). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. KINGSTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. KINGSTON. Madam Speaker, I wanted to tonight touch base on 3 issues very quickly, but first I want to say, representing the Third Infantry Division in Hinesville, Georgia, Fort Stewart-Hunter, I had the opportunity on Friday to go say good-bye to many of the troops who were leaving to go to Kuwait. They were on the tarmac, they had already said good-bye to their families, they had already gotten their paperwork in order. They had guns in hand, canteens loaded, rucksacks on their back, they were sitting in their fuel trucks, in their communication trucks and Jeeps and so forth, getting ready to get on a C-5 and go to Germany or to Spain, then on to Kuwait. The men and women who were about to go in harm's way on behalf of not only the United States of America but the entire world were standing tall. They were confident but not cocky, they were proud but not arrogant and to a person brave and sure of themselves. They are well-trained.

I told them that the American people are behind them. I was excited as everybody else was when I read about the potential peace agreement. I hope that it stands. However, I do think that this administration needs to clearly outline to Congress, this week, exactly what that agreement means to our foreign policy in Iraq and the Middle East. What will be the long-term ramifications? Do we have a lasting peace, what will be involved, and can our troops come home? Can we bring down the 25,000 troops that we have? I am very interested to hear from the administration on that. I, like many Members of Congress, again would ask this administration to tell us exactly what is going on.

To touch base on a couple of issues, real quickly. Education. This year we need to do everything we can to decentralize education and put it back in the hands of the local people. I was talking to a woman in Brunswick, Georgia whose mother was a teacher in Gray, Georgia, one of the great teachers that introduces all the kids to all the wonderful subjects and has taught most of the kids in the small town of Gray. She said that not long ago, a Harvard federally funded education consultant went down to Gray, Georgia and told this 30-year veteran of teaching that she needed to start pointing to the other side of the chalkboard because kids learn cog-

nitively better on one side of the brain than the other and if the teacher would only start pointing to the other side of the chalkboard, these kids would learn a lot more. That kind of absurd busybodiness out of Washington, we do not need.

The second issue, taxes. We need to continue to be mindful that the average American family pays 38 percent in taxes. That means every Monday, you are working for the government and most of Tuesday you are working for the government. We need to reduce our tax burden to the 25 percent range. We need to simplify our Tax Code. If we go to a sales tax or a flat tax, whichever, it is better than the Tax Code that we have now. Then we need to change the attitude of the IRS. They work for us, the American people. We do not work for them. You should be considered innocent until proven guilty.

Finally, we need to have a mature dialogue on retirement. We really do not have a zero balanced budget. We have a Social Security surplus that we are applying to the general fund. If we want to protect Social Security and put it first, we have to say absolutely no new spending programs.

Madam Speaker, the President has committed to over \$100 billion in new spending programs for this year in his budget. That money comes right out of the surplus in Social Security. We need to personalize Social Security, but we need to protect it. The first step is not spending the money. In these things, education, taxes and retirement, I hope that this Congress makes them the top priority.

10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE NAGORNO KARABAGH MOVEMENT

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

Mr. PALLONE. Madam Speaker, I have come to the floor of the House tonight to pay tribute to a very important milestone for the Armenian people and for people everywhere who care about the values of freedom, human rights and self-determination.

Last Friday, February 20, marked the 10th anniversary of the liberation struggle of Nagorno Karabagh. Nagorno Karabagh, or Artsakh as it is known to the Armenian people, is an independent Nation populated primarily by ethnic Armenians and located between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan. The Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin consigned Nagorno Karabagh to Azerbaijan despite the fact that this land has been continuously inhabited by Armenians for centuries. Armenia was the first Nation to embrace Christianity, and Karabagh was an integral part of the ancient land of Armenia. Under the Soviet system Nagorno Karabagh was recognized as an autonomous region because of its distinct Armenian identity.

Madam Speaker, in 1988 as Soviet central authority was breaking down, the Armenian people living in Azerbaijan were subjected to harassment, deportation and pogroms, massacres. On February 20, 1988, thousands of Armenians marched in Stepanakert, the capital of Karabagh, inspired by public protests in Armenia the day before. Eventually the people of Karabagh prevailed in their struggle, fighting and winning a war of independence. A cease-fire was signed in 1994, but persistent violations by Azerbaijan continue to make that cease-fire shaky at best.

The cause of Karabagh became a rallying cry for the entire Armenian nation and the Diaspora, including 1 million Armenian-Americans. The establishment of the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Karabagh also helped focus American attention on this previously ignored part of the world.

Madam Speaker, Nagorno Karabagh's declaration of independence on September 2, 1991 and a referendum which passed shortly afterward were all conducted within the requirements of international law. Yet 10 years into their independence movement, Nagorno Karabagh still has not achieved the international recognition to which it is entitled. I am sorry to say, Madam Speaker, that the United States is among the countries that still refuse to recognize the Nagorno Karabagh republic. In his speech to the national assembly last Friday, President Ghukasian of Karabagh stated that Karabagh has its own state symbols and is able to conduct its foreign and home policies by itself. He expressed certainty that international recognition would only be a matter of time.

Madam Speaker, having twice visited Nagorno Karabagh, I can attest to the fact that Karabagh is indeed a functioning state. The sense of cohesion and mission among its citizens is inspiring. I wish I could share President Ghukasian's optimism about international recognition, although I do want to reiterate the fact that the foreign operations appropriations bill for this fiscal year does provide \$12.5 million in aid targeted at Nagorno Karabagh. I want to express my admiration for the members of the foreign ops subcommittee who made that happen. I see one of the members is actually on the floor there, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. KINGSTON).

I am also concerned that U.S. policy, though, is headed in the wrong direction. The fact that the United States is a cochair of the OSCE's Minsk Group, which was formed to achieve a negotiated settlement of the Karabagh conflict, offers a great opportunity for us to take a stand in support of democracy and the right of peoples to determine their own future. Unfortunately, the United States' negotiating position places far too much importance on the principle of territorial integrity, keep-

ing Karabagh under Azerbaijan's authority. The U.S.-supported negotiating position essentially forces Karabagh to surrender the gains it made on the battlefield with no binding security guarantees in exchange. The Karabagh Armenians would once again be at the mercy of Azerbaijan.

I cannot help but conclude that the lure of the potential oil reserves in the Caspian Sea off the shores of Azerbaijan is influencing our policy in this region. Madam Speaker, last Friday I sent a letter of congratulations to President Ghukasian. I wrote that seeing the brave people of Artsakh and the dedicated officials serving in the government and armed forces of the NKR, I was reminded of the founding of our United States. Our Founding Fathers also had to fight for their independence and international recognition. I said I hoped that the United States and the West will base our policies in the Caucasus on the respect for self-determination and human rights on which our own nations are founded.

The progress the people of Karabagh have made in 10 years is nothing short of miraculous. In the decade since 1988, the elected government has proven to be worthy of recognition as the legitimate government of the land and the people of Artsakh. In a step that I hope will spur further progress towards that goal, I am pleased to announce that the foreign minister of Nagorno Karabagh, Mrs. Naira Melkumian, will be in Washington next week and we plan to have a briefing next Wednesday under the auspices of our Armenia Caucus to allow her an opportunity to interact with Members of Congress. It is my hope, Madam Speaker, that future anniversaries of Karabagh will be marked by strong expressions of congratulations from the American people and from our government.

Mr. SHERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the Republic of Nagorno Karabagh on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of its struggle for independence. I extend my congratulations to the people of Nagorno Karabagh on this truly historic occasion.

Ten years ago as the Soviet Union was falling apart and Armenians faced a new cycle of deportation and violence, Nagorno Karabagh took a brave step forward. With extraordinary sacrifice and courage, the people of Nagorno Karabagh affirmed their right of self-determination and began their struggle for independence. The Republic of Nagorno Karabagh emerged as a newly independent state.

It is now time for the United States and the international community to recognize the legitimate government of the Republic of Nagorno Karabagh. It is now time for the independence of the Republic of Nagorno Karabagh to be secured with a lasting peace. Only direct talks between the parties to the conflict can secure that peace. I regret that to date the OSCE negotiations, co-chaired by the United States, have not produced workable and acceptable solutions.

I will continue to fight along with the Armenian community in the diaspora for assistance to the people of Nagorno Karabagh and for a lasting peace. I am gratified that my original

proposals for aid to Nagorno Karabagh were adopted by my colleagues on the Committee on Appropriations who allocated \$12.5 million in U.S. assistance. I urge the Administration to move expeditiously to distribute this aid to the needy people of Nagorno Karabagh.

I would like to bring your attention to the "Caucasus Peace and Stability Act" which I introduced last session to support the peace process in Nagorno Karabagh and to deter renewed Azerbaijani aggression. This bill calls upon the United States to act as an impartial mediator in the peace negotiations and to foster confidence building measures to create incentives for peace leading to a lasting and equitable long-term settlement to the conflict. In the case of renewed aggression by Azerbaijan on Nagorno Karabagh, it calls for the imposition of trade and investment sanctions on Azerbaijan and a ban on commercial arms sales. These provisions are intended to increase the security of Nagorno Karabagh and to provide an economic incentive for peace.

I pledge that I will continue to uphold the sovereignty of Nagorno Karabagh and U.S. support for democracy, economic development and a secure future for the people of Nagorno Karabagh. I look forward to celebrating the 20th anniversary of a free and independent Republic of Nagorno Karabagh.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, today I rise in honor of ten years of struggle and determination by the people of Nagorno Karabagh to gain their independence.

For ten years, the people of Nagorno Karabagh have aspired to create a republic where human rights and democracy are respected and cherished.

The people of Nagorno Karabagh, mainly ethnic Armenians, have survived and overcome the horrors and destruction of war. For ten years they have resisted efforts to bring about another Armenian Genocide in the Caucasus. Today, they continue to bravely face the threat of violence and deprivation from their surrounding neighbor, the Republic of Azerbaijan.

For ten years the people of Nagorno Karabagh have fought in defense of their homeland. In support of their efforts, I call upon the international community and the United States, as co-chair of the Minsk Group, to ensure that a peaceful resolution to the conflict in the region respects the self-determination and democratic aspirations of the people of Nagorno Karabagh.

Mr. Speaker, our own nation was founded on the struggle and hope for a free and democratic nation, free from tyranny, free from oppression, free to determine our own future, free to honor the basic dignity of every human being. As an American, this is my wish for the people of Nagorno Karabagh—that next year will see a free and independent Republic of Nagorno Karabagh.

I want to thank my colleagues from New Jersey [Mr. PALLONE] and from California [Mr. SHERMAN] for their strong and capable leadership on these issues, and for coordinating this time today to recognize and celebrate the tenth anniversary of the independence movement in Nagorno Karabagh.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. PALLONE. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within