

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

which to revise and extend their remarks on the subject of the 10th anniversary of the Nagorno Karabagh movement.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New Jersey?

There was no objection.

#### TAX REFORM

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

Mr. RIGGS. Madam Speaker, earlier today I rose during morning hour to talk about how we can increase take-home pay and improve retirement security in America. I want to elaborate on those earlier comments this morning during this special order tonight. I am talking about the Congress leading our country to a new level of freedom and opportunity for every single American worker and taxpayer.

First of all, let me stipulate that I am not talking about wage and price controls. I am not talking about another government mandate. I am not talking about Washington and the Federal Government through the Congress trying to dictate to the marketplace. I do not support a further increase in the minimum wage. But I do very much favor reducing taxes further for working Americans. We can start in the area of tax reduction by addressing the marriage penalty, which is a very, very unfair, very punitive section of our Tax Code. We ought to eliminate that, because the marriage penalty affects working-class individuals, those on limited or modest incomes, those who are earning a fixed wage or salary the most.

An example that was given on this floor earlier today during morning hour by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. WELLER) was a teacher, or a police officer living in your community who is married and whose spouse is of necessity working. If we can eliminate the marriage penalty in the Tax Code, that couple will be able to keep more of their own hard-earned tax dollars.

Second, earlier today, promoted the Middle Class Tax Relief Act and the Taxpayer Choice Act, both introduced by our colleague, the gentleman from South Dakota (Mr. THUNE). This is good legislation because the net effect would be to raise the income levels for the 28 percent tax bracket, thereby putting more people in the 15-percent, the lowest tax bracket, and for those who are already in the 15-percent tax bracket, Congressman THUNE and I propose to increase the personal exemption.

This is a bottom-up approach, if you will, a bubble-up approach to lowering taxes in America. It is broad-based, real tax relief. It gets away from this notion back here in Washington that we can only do targeted tax relief that picks winners and losers from certain segments of the American people, and

it is a Republican solution, if I might be so bold to say, on Democratic terms. This legislation will be difficult for the practitioners of class warfare and what I call the politics of envy to oppose.

Let me further say that if President Clinton has more money to pay for more social spending, as he suggested from in this Chamber during the State of the Union address for a host of new programs, many of them so-called mandatory entitlement programs, then I respectfully submit that we have the money for tax cuts.

But we should not do tax relief without real tax reform. We need fundamental tax reform in this country today right now to put a stop to the collection abuses by the IRS and to effectively end the IRS as we know it. That is why I and many of my Republican colleagues have already signed a public pledge and we have cosponsored legislation to sunset the Tax Code, the current tax system, by the year 2001.

This is a death sentence for the Tax Code, and it would move the country, as Congressman KINGSTON was just suggesting, in the direction of a fairer, a flatter, and a simpler tax system, one that embraces a single rate of taxation. That single rate of Federal taxation, though, when combined with State and local taxes, should not exceed 25 percent total, 25 percent in the aggregate for taxes at all levels; Federal, State and local. Today, the median family, the average family of four, is paying 38 percent of their income in taxes at all levels, and that is more than what they pay for food, clothing, housing and transportation combined.

Now, the other point I want to talk about is giving taxpayers more choice. We can let taxpayers today choose between paying a flat tax or the current system. It is just that simple. We could give taxpayers that option, that choice that says we would be empowering taxpayers because they would have the right to decide whether they prefer a flat tax or reporting all their income, and after they have declared that income, simply paying a flat rate of tax on that income or staying under the current system.

Furthermore, we could let taxpayers today decide to give them the right, again the choice and the option, to choose to invest a portion of their own hard-earned money, what they pay in payroll taxes or what are called FICA contributions into a directed IRA, which would earn a better return on their money than Social Security.

So imagine that we let taxpayers check off now a flat tax versus the current system, check off now to put their own money, at least a portion of their payroll taxes into Social Security. The net effect again, higher take-home pay, better retirement security, more freedom, and opportunity for every American worker and taxpayer.

#### REQUEST FOR REINSTATEMENT OF SPECIAL ORDER

Mrs. MALONEY of New York. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to reclaim my time and to address the House for 5 minutes.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. Northup). Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from New York?

Ms. WATERS. Madam Speaker, for purposes of trying to understand how the rules work, I object.

What happens under the 5-minute rule? Do we entertain 5-minute presentations for as long as unanimous consent is not objected to?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. That is correct. It takes unanimous consent to address the House for 5 minutes.

Ms. WATERS. Is there a possibility of all of those who keep coming with their 5 minutes to do it following the time that I have reserved on the floor?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentlewoman from New York was already on the 5-minute list. She came back to reclaim her time. Unanimous consent is required for anyone to reclaim or to add their name to the list.

Ms. WATERS. Madam Speaker, I do not want to interfere with the gentlewoman being able to address the House, but I need to know how long this can go on tonight if I do not object to unanimous consent. How many more could come? I have been here for almost 40 minutes.

So is the Chair saying that if I never object, people could keep coming and doing this?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. By the Rules of the House, as long as unanimous consent is obtained, a member may speak for 5 minutes.

Ms. WATERS. If I do object, do they have the opportunity to do it following my reserved 1 hour?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Yes, they could come back later tonight.

Ms. WATERS. Then, Madam Speaker, I must proceed, and those who have not been here must know I have to get out of here.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Objection is heard.

#### PLIGHT OF BLACK FARMERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 1997, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATERS) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Ms. WATERS. Madam Speaker, I rise to bring to the attention of the House a problem and a situation that has lingered for far too long. I rise this evening to talk about the plight of black farmers and others in our Nation who have not been able to receive fair treatment at the United States Department of Agriculture.

What I am about to describe is one of the most unfortunate situations I have encountered since I have been a Member of this House. I have been working