Mr. THUNE. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a few moments here today to publicly commend the people of South Dakota for their courage, their bravery and their generosity in the face of disaster.

On the evening of Saturday, May 30, 1998, a tornado struck the small town of Spencer, South Dakota. When the storm passed, a handful of buildings remained standing on the far edge of town. Otherwise, the entire city of 322 people was gone. Six people were killed and 150 were injured.

It was a difficult time, not just for the people of Spencer but for those in surrounding communities as well. The residents who lost their lives in the storm were elderly people who had lived in or near the community their entire lives. They were the fixtures of the community, the local historians. Now they and part of our prairie history are gone.

Many of the other residents of Spencer had spent their entire lives there as well. They woke up every morning in the same house, said good morning to the same neighbors, went to work at the same business, came home again to the same house, day after day for most of their lives. So imagine what it would be like to suddenly emerge from what is left of the concrete pit that was your basement to find that it is not there anymore. None of it is there anymore. The house is gone, the car is gone, the streets are gone, the business is gone, the neighbors are gone. Poof. Gone with the wind.

That is what life is like today for the residents of Spencer, South Dakota. It is a terrible adjustment, and many are not sure what the future holds or how to begin building a new future without a home or a hometown.

But here is where my pride in the people of South Dakota begins. The call went out for volunteers to help clean up the ravaged city. Governor Bill Janklow asked for a thousand people to show up. Guess how many he ended up with. Eight times that amount. Eight thousand people showed up to pick through piles of rock and debris in search of torn wedding pictures and beat up toys. Eight thousand people.

They ran out of food. The call went out for more. It arrived. People brought pizzas, they brought soft drinks, they brought sandwiches. They did not exactly start with five loaves and two fishes, but through the miracle of generosity that food multiplied to feed 8,000 hungry volunteers. I am told that by the end of the day, they had 16,000 meals before it was done.

Those who could not show up in person found other ways to help. A local television station held a telethon to raise money. They collected more than $600,000 for the disaster victims. When the phone lines got busy, people jumped into their cars and started dropping the money off at the station in person. The response was nothing short of overwhelming.

The volunteers are not the only ones who came through when the call went out. I would like to commend all the fine people who work for the Federal Emergency Management Agency for the job that they do in responding immediately, thoroughly and professionally when disaster strikes. I know the people of Spencer are grateful for their help.

As with any crisis, heroes emerge from the wreckage to remind us that we still have heroes walking among us, real heroes of the common, sturdy and lasting type. The kind of heroes that do not earn millions or play basketball or football or disappoint us later on.

Rocky Kirby is one of those heroes. He is the mayor of Spencer. He says his most difficult decision prior to the storm was deciding whether or not to pave the streets. Now he faces the daunting job of steering what is left of his community through the difficult months ahead. He is doing it because it is his duty to his town and his neighbors. He certainly is not doing it for the money. As mayor he draws a salary of $30 a month.

Donna Ruden is another ordinary person who has shown extraordinary courage. Her home was one of the few in town left standing, so she has turned her one home into a one-building Main Street. Her home now serves as the town bank, the insurance office and city hall. She is running all three from her home, grateful to have a place to live. She wants to help her neighbors who do not.

We hear so often in this country about the bad, Mr. Speaker, about kids shooting kids and neighbors robbing from neighbors, about crimes and drugs and hate and violence. I want to tell my colleagues today that the core of what is good in this country and the core of what is good in human beings is still alive and well in a little town called Spencer, South Dakota. We as a Nation can all be proud of what we have witnessed there. I know I certainly am.

NAGORNO KARABAGH PEACE PROCESS

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. Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening to share with my colleagues and the American people some new ideas on how we can work to promote greater cooperation and stability in the Caucasus region of the former Soviet Union, and specifically how we can jump-start the peace process in Nagorno Karabagh. During the Memorial Day recess, the gentleman from Rhode Island (Mr. KENNEDY) and I had the opportunity to travel to the Republics of Armenia and Nagorno Karabagh to meet with government officials from both countries as well as with U.S. officials in the region.

As I have mentioned in the House on several occasions, the people of Nagorno Karabagh fought and won a war of independence against Azerbaijan. A tenuous cease-fire has been in place since 1994, but a more lasting settlement has been elusive. The U.S. has been involved in a major way in the negotiations intended to produce a just and lasting peace. Our country is a co-chair, along with France and Russia, of the international negotiating group, commonly known as the Minsk Group, formed to seek a solution to the Nagorno Karabagh conflict.

Mr. Speaker, this so-called Minsk process, under the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, OSCE, a process of shuttle diplomacy whereby the American and other negotiators travel between the various capitals seeking agreement on a resolution of the conflict, has so far not been successful in trying to resolve the Nagorno Karabagh conflict. What is needed are some new ideas and more realistic approaches that will lead to a just and lasting settlement of this conflict.

Unfortunately, the U.S. position has thus far sided with Azerbaijan's claim of so-called territorial integrity, despite the fact that this land has been Armenian land for centuries, and the borders which gave the land to Azerbaijan were imposed by Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin.

It is time, Mr. Speaker, for the U.S. and our Minsk Group partners to forget about the idea of territorial integrity as the foundation for peacefully resolving this conflict. In addition, we should be pushing for direct negotiations involving Nagorno Karabagh and Azerbaijan.

Instead of sticking with the unworkable notion of Karabagh as an inseparable part of Azerbaijan, subordinate to the Azeri capital of Baku, I believe we should consider the idea of horizontal links, a federation among equals. This model has been used in resolving the Bosnia war and in the current negotiations aimed at resolving the Cyprus conflict.

I am pleased to report, Mr. Speaker, some positive changes in the position of our State Department, including their apparent willingness to push for direct negotiations between Nagorno Karabagh and Azerbaijan. I am sensing a newfound flexibility by the State Department in terms of dropping the old adherence to the failed approaches of the Minsk Group in the past.

I would stress the importance of strengthening the current, shaky cease-fire as a priority for the Minsk Group. The recent negotiations in Northern Ireland could provide a model where separate, direct negotiations were held on the issue of militia armaments. In the case of Karabagh, making a priority of securing the cease-fire would help end the violence, stop the continuing casualties and help build confidence for additional agreements between the parties.

The other key is the need for ironclad security guarantees for Karabagh,

with the Republic of Armenia given a central role in the process. As I mentioned, Karabagh won the war and holds the strategic advantage. It's unrealistic and unfair to expect Karabagh to give up its gains on the battlefield for vague promises at the negotiating table.

Another key point on the Karabagh negotiations. It is no secret that Azerbaijan has had the support of big oil interests in its corner. Azerbaijan's territory may have significant oil reserves beneath it in the Caspian Sea area, although some new studies question just how significant these resources may be. Unfortunately, powerful and well-connected lobbyists for the oil industry have basically backed up Azerbaijan's intransigence in the negotiating process over Karabagh. I am afraid our administration's policy has tended to side with Azerbaijan because of the oil issue. I hope that Members of Congress who are involved in this issue can work with me in getting the administration to convince Azerbaijan and the oil industry that the development of those resources will continue to be complicated until the Karabagh issue is resolved.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, another very troubling aspect of this issue is the indications of possible illegal transfers of U.S. or NATO standard weapons and other military supplies being sent to Azerbaijan by Turkey. Turkey has long sided with Azerbaijan. One of the major complications of the conflict is the blockade of Armenia and Karabagh by Azerbaijan, and Turkey's blockade of Armenia, in support of Azerbaijan. These blockades have made life hard for the Armenian people, stopping vitally needed humanitarian relief supplies from the U.S. and other countries. Now there are growing indications that Turkey is funneling military equipment to Azerbaijan, something I have seen myself in a previous visit to the front lines in Nagorno Karabagh. As part of our efforts to resolve the conflict over Karabagh, we must restrain our NATO ally Turkey from contributing more fuel to the fire in the form of arms and other military supplies.

Just a few weeks ago, I opposed the suggestion that appeared in the media that Turkey may want to transfer American F–16 fighter planes to Azerbaijan. That country already has air superiority because it inherited a lot more airplanes from the Soviet Union than did Armenia. F–16s would give Azerbaijan overwhelming air superiority.

There are now suggestions that Turkey may transfer advanced NATO howitzer (cannon artillery) to Azerbaijan. The U.S. government cannot allow its military equipment to be used against our Armenian friends.

I am currently working with some of my colleagues in this body to determine the level of Turkish support for Azerbaijan's military and in putting pressure on Turkey to be a partner in the search for a lasting peace in the region—not a contributor to a continuing cycle of violence and tensions.

CHINA

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

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Mr. Speaker, President Clinton seems like he is absolutely committed on this upcoming trip to China. We have asked him to reconsider this trip and, no, he will not reconsider the trip. And Congress officially asked him whether or not he would at least attempt not to do something in Tiananmen Square which would then make a mockery of the human rights commitments of this country by holding some sort of meeting with people who murdered hundreds if not thousands of human rights activists at that very same location 10 years ago. But, again, we were rebuffed in that request as well. The President of the United States as the President of the world's leading democracy will visit, then, the world's leading human rights abuser, the world's most powerful totalitarian regime.

Well, this President does have an excuse. Yes, in the past President Reagan visited China and so did President Bush. But in the past when Presidents have visited China, I think it is important for us to understand that China at that time was in a transition, or going through changes that made it appear that China would someday evolve out of its dictatorship.

□ 1800

And thus it is all right to visit a country that is not free, but it seems to be going in the right direction in that its government is permitting more freedoms. Unfortunately that is not the case for this Presidential visit. China, since the killings at Tiananmen Square, has become even more tyrannical, and more belligerent, and more aggressive and has more power to commit aggression against its neighbors.

Spokesmen for the administration say that the President will be calling for a strategic partnership with this Communist regime. Well, naturally calling for a strategic partnership with this totalitarian regime, this powerful totalitarian regime, is causing concern among other countries in that region that are democratic countries.

We have already seen the results of the folly of the President's policies. India felt obliged to reaffirm its own nuclear arsenal with an explosion, of a nuclear explosion. The Pakistanis followed. So what we have is an unrest in the subcontinent and a greater chance for conflict, a massive, horrible conflict, between the Pakistanis and the Indians because of this unrest and this proliferation that can be traced right back to the President's China policies. In other words, the world is not as safe as it was.

Then we have lesser gangsters in the world like you find in Kosova where you have a murderous regime next door in Serbia thinking that they can go into Kosova and murder people in order to get them to submit. Now why are they doing this? Why does the regime, Milosevic's regime, which was guilty of so many human rights abuses in Bosnia earlier, now feel that they could perhaps do it again? It is because this administration has lost its moral basis, has lost its standing, has lost the principles in which it had so that in which people gave it respect if residing with those principles.

There are credible reports from Kosova that indicate that a repeat of the most horrific acts that we have seen in the Balkans is going on right now. Milosevic and his goons, the Serbian dictatorship, the last Communist dictatorship on the continent of Europe, have turned their bloody knives on the people of Kosova especially targeting vulnerable civilian populations for ethnic cleansing, not only in the border areas, but deep into the heartland of Kosova where the people are almost all Albanian, of Albanian extraction. It is incredible that despite the assurances by this administration that their diplomacy is succeeding in calming down Mr. Milosevic and keeping him under control, we are seeing numerous reports of entire villages being wiped out, with the news media discovering pools of blood in the streets of these villages. We have reports from family members of Albanians, men having their throats slit right in front of their families and of indiscriminate artillery bombardment of marketplaces.

Mr. Speaker, our government and our European allies should not stand by and wring their hands. We must act forcefully, and we must stand on principle. Unfortunately the pronouncements of this administration as far as tyrants, whether they are big and small, it seems that these pronouncements by this administration are not being taken seriously.

We can see in China where they continue their own proliferation of the nuclear technology that we have given them as well as building up their forces, their military forces, and stepping up their opposition and here with a small dictatorship when we face that dictatorship of Milosevic in Serbia.

The world is a less safe place because we strayed from our fundamental principles.

IMPROVEMENTS IN THE DISTRICT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PETERSON of Pennsylvania). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I have informed this body a few weeks ago that I would be coming to report on how the District of Columbia is proceeding as it moves to improve itself in the city. But my internal campaign is behind the times because the improvements are coming so fast and furious.

Have you seen this morning's Washington Post? On the front section of