

calculations, we will gain a more accurate understanding of where we stand financially.

□ 2215

I have been pleased by recent reports the Senate budget proposal may include a similar proposal toward reducing the debt. By establishing statutory debt limits on publicly held debt we can hold our collective feet to the fire by locking in gradual debt reduction. Debt reduction should be a central component of our budget plans, and I urge my colleagues in both chambers to insist that the 2000 budget proposal include a long-term plan to pay down our national debt. Let us agree today to put an end to treating our national budget like a bad credit card spending. Let us agree to pay more than the monthly minimum and stop spending 15 percent of our budget on interest payments.

We are like those people with the credit card who just keep spending. We do not even hardly make the minimum payment. We pay the interest, but we have no plan to ever pay the principle, and today we ought to take the steps toward establishing a plan to do just that. We are at a crossroads. Let us make the legacy that we leave to the next generation one of economic hope and prosperity.

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

(Mr. BLUMENAUER addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

(Mr. DEMINT addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

(Mr. FILNER addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

(Mr. SMITH of Washington addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

(Mr. HOEFFEL addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

RESOLUTION OF THE NAGORNO KARABAGH CONFLICT

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 wanted to take this opportunity tonight to welcome the visiting President of the Nagorno Karabagh Republic, Mr. Arkady Ghoukasian. President Ghoukasian is visiting our Nation's capital this week as part of a trip that also includes stops in California and New York, and accompanying the President on his first visit to the United States is Ms. Naira Melkounian, the Foreign Minister of the Nagorno Karabagh Republic.

Yesterday I took part in a meeting with President Ghoukasian and Foreign Minister Melkounian that was attended by several of my colleagues in the House from both parties. The President also held private meetings with several other Members of the House and the Senate and representatives of the Armenian Assembly of America and the Armenian National Committee of America also took part in those meetings. The President also had meetings with the State Department and met with some of Washington's leading think tanks and the media.

Mr. Speaker, Nagorno Karabagh is a region in the Caucasus Mountains of the former Soviet Union that has now and always has historically been populated by Armenians. Unfortunately, Nagorno Karabagh's independence has not been given recognition by the United States or the international community. Neighboring Azerbaijan continues to claim Nagorno Karabagh's territory. A bloody war was fought over this region, and the Karabagh Armenians successfully defended their homeland. A cease-fire was declared in 1994, which has more or less held despite ongoing violations by Azerbaijan, but a final resolution of the conflict has been elusive.

Mr. Speaker, the United States is a leader in the effort to help the parties to this conflict achieve a just and lasting resolution of the conflict. The U.S. is a co-chair along with France and Russia of the Minsk Group, of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe established to resolve this dispute.

The United States and our Minsk Group partners last year put forward a new plan known as the Common-State proposal for resolving the conflict. Armenia and Nagorno Karabagh have both agreed to accept the proposal as a basis for negotiations despite serious reservations, but Azerbaijan's response to the constructive proposal by the United States and our partners has been a flat no.

Mr. Speaker, the U.S. non-recognition of Nagorno Karabagh creates issues about who in the State Department should meet with President Ghoukasian or other representatives of Nagorno Karabagh, and last week I was

joined by 19 of my colleagues on a bipartisan basis in writing to Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott asking that in his capacity as the American co-chair of the Minsk Group he personally meet with Mr. Ghoukasian during his visit to our Nation's capital. Unfortunately, Secretary Talbott was not in Washington at the time of President Ghoukasian's visit, and President Ghoukasian met instead with Donald Keyser who is special negotiator for Nagorno Karabagh and the NIS regional conflicts. Mr. Keyser I should say is doing a fine job in trying to win the confidence of the parties to the conflict, but I believe it is important to stress the need for the highest level contacts possible which are appropriate and provide a sign of goodwill that would help encourage progress in the negotiations. President Ghoukasian's status as the elected leader of one of the parties to the conflict argues in of according him high-level recognition, and indeed our two Minsk Group partners, France and Russia, provide a stronger degree of recognition for the Karabagh government than the United States does.

Last month a bipartisan group of Members of Congress and our staffs met with Special Negotiator Keyser. At that meeting and in our follow-up letter to Secretary Talbott we urged that the United States stay the course in terms of the compromise Common-State approach, and, as I mentioned, this approach has been accepted by Armenian Nagorno Karabagh as a basis for direct negotiations, but thus far Azerbaijan has rejected this approach. We hope that this rejection will not be the last word, and we urge the administration to take proactive steps to reverse Azerbaijan's rejection.

Mr. Speaker, last week I testified before the Subcommittee on Foreign Operations of the House Committee on Appropriations on the fiscal year 2000 legislation, and I called for assistance to both the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Nagorno Karabagh and to offer some proposals for how we can advance the peace process through this legislation. The subcommittee, I should say, has been extremely attentive to the concerns of Armenia, Nagorno Karabagh and the entire Caucasus region, and thanks to the subcommittee U.S. humanitarian assistance is flowing to Nagorno Karabagh. I urged the Subcommittee on Foreign Operations to express its strong support for the U.S. position in the Minsk Group negotiations on Nagorno Karabagh, and I hope the subcommittee will adopt language calling on the State Department to stay the course and to press Azerbaijan to come back to the negotiating table. There are strong indications that Azerbaijan believes that it can maintain its rejectionist policy by playing the oil card given the interest in developing petroleum resources in the Caspian Sea although recent test drilling indicates less than expected quantities of oil are