

gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 361.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H. Res. 361.

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

There was no objection.

#### CALLING FOR FREE AND FAIR PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 326) calling for free and fair parliamentary elections in the Republic of Azerbaijan, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

##### H. RES. 326

Whereas the Republic of Azerbaijan is scheduled to hold elections for its parliament, the Milli Majlis, in November 2005;

Whereas Azerbaijan has enjoyed a strong relationship with the United States since its independence from the former Soviet Union in 1991;

Whereas international observers monitoring Azerbaijan's October 2003 presidential election found that the pre-election, election day, and post-election environments fell short of international standards;

Whereas the International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) in Baku, Azerbaijan, deployed by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe, found that there were numerous instances of violence by both members of the opposition and government forces;

Whereas the international election observers also found inequality and irregularities in campaign and election conditions, including intimidation of opposition supporters, restrictions on political rallies by opposition candidates, and voting fraud;

Whereas Azerbaijan freely accepted a series of commitments on democracy, human rights, and the rule of law when that country joined the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe as a participating State in 1992;

Whereas, following the 2003 presidential election, the Council of Europe adopted Resolution 1358 (2004) demanding that the Government of Azerbaijan immediately implement a series of steps that included the release of political prisoners, investigation of election fraud, and the creation of public service television to allow all political parties to better communicate with the people of Azerbaijan;

Whereas, since the 2003 presidential election, the Government of Azerbaijan has taken a number of positive steps by releasing some political prisoners and working toward

the establishment of public service television;

Whereas a genuinely free and fair election requires that citizens be guaranteed the right and opportunity to exercise their civil and political rights free from intimidation, undue influence, threats of political retribution, or other forms of coercion by national or local authorities or others;

Whereas a genuinely free and fair election requires government and public authorities to ensure that candidates and political parties enjoy equal treatment before the law and that government resources are not employed to the advantage of individual candidates or political parties; and

Whereas the establishment of a transparent, free and fair election process for the 2005 parliamentary elections would be an important step in Azerbaijan's progress toward full integration into the democratic community of nations: Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—

(1) calls upon the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan to hold orderly, peaceful, and free and fair parliamentary elections in November 2005 in order to ensure the long-term growth and stability of the country;

(2) calls upon the Government of Azerbaijan to guarantee the full participation of opposition parties in the upcoming elections, including members of opposition parties arrested in the months leading up to the November 2005 parliamentary elections;

(3) calls upon the opposition parties to fully and peacefully participate in the November 2005 parliamentary elections, and calls upon the Government of Azerbaijan to create the conditions for the participation on equal grounds of all viable candidates;

(4) believes it is critical that the November 2005 parliamentary elections be viewed by the people of Azerbaijan as free and fair, and that all sides refrain from violence during the campaign, on election day, and following the election;

(5) calls upon the Government of Azerbaijan to guarantee election monitors from the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Azeri political parties, candidates' representatives, nongovernmental organizations, and other private institutions and organizations, both foreign and domestic, unimpeded access to all aspects of the election process;

(6) supports recommendations made by the Council of Europe on amendments to the Unified Election Code of Azerbaijan, specifically to ensure equitable representation of opposition and pro-government forces in all election commissions;

(7) urges the international community and domestic nongovernmental organizations to provide a sufficient number of election observers to ensure credible monitoring and reporting of the November 2005 parliamentary elections;

(8) recognizes the need for the establishment of an independent media and assurances by the Government of Azerbaijan that freedom of the press will be guaranteed; and

(9) calls upon the Government of Azerbaijan to guarantee freedom of speech and freedom of assembly.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) and the gentleman from California (Mr. LANTOS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN).

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H. Res. 326, as amended.

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

There was no objection.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, House Resolution 326 is a resolution calling on the government of Azerbaijan to ensure that their upcoming parliamentary elections in November are peaceful, free and fair.

In the most recent elections in Azerbaijan, the 2003 presidential elections, international election observers concluded that they fell well short of international standards. The observers found numerous instances of voting fraud, restrictions on political rallies and intimidation against political opponents.

Since that election, Azerbaijan has taken a number of positive steps, such as releasing some political prisoners, opening their airwaves to opposing viewpoints and allowing greater freedom of speech and assembly. However, much more needs to be done before the people of Azerbaijan and the international community can have confidence in the outcome of the November elections.

As stated in H. Res. 326, the government needs to take several steps to ensure fairness in the election process. First, it must permit the full participation of all opposition parties in the upcoming elections.

Second, and perhaps most importantly, the government of Azerbaijan must allow election monitors from the OSCE, Azeri political parties and other political organizations unimpeded access to all aspects of the election process. The government simply cannot pick and choose which organizations will be allowed to verify that the election is free and fair.

Finally, the resolution supports the international efforts to change the election code of Azerbaijan to provide all political forces with equitable representation in the country's election commissions.

Azerbaijan and the United States have enjoyed a strong, bilateral relationship since Azerbaijan gained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. We look forward to this friendship growing even closer in the coming years. In the long term, however, the strength of the relationship between our two nations, as well as the stability of government in Azerbaijan, will largely depend on Azerbaijan becoming a more free and more democratic nation.

I therefore urge the government of Azerbaijan to hold free and fair elections, and I urge my colleagues to support this resolution.