

By Congressman David Price in the Congressional Record

...House Resolution 24 would reauthorize the work of the [House Democracy Assistance] Commission. This is a body that was inspired by the work of the Frost-Solomon Task Force back in the early 1990s. We worked then with states in Central and Eastern Europe as they were emerging from communism.

Our commission has undertaken this same kind of work. We are building the institutional capacities of legislatures in emerging democracies. We are working with them to develop their research and budget analysis, oversight, legislative drafting, and other capabilities.

There is a difference, though. In contrast to the Frost-Solomon effort, our scope is not just Central and Eastern Europe, although some of our partner countries are still in that region. We are undertaking around the world to work with partner legislatures. In the commission's first 2 years, we have worked with legislatures in 12 nations. Many of these countries are of key strategic import for our own Nation, and all are enthusiastic, worthy, and willing partners: Afghanistan, Colombia, East Timor, Georgia, Haiti, Indonesia, Kenya, Lebanon, Liberia, Macedonia, Mongolia, and Ukraine.

Madam Speaker, we view our work as a small but important niche in the United States' mission to spread democracy around the world. We do this not in the sense that we have all the answers about how to promote democratic rights and governance. The commission's work is rooted in the fundamental realization that the heart of democracy is not found just in elections but between elections. Between elections, that is when a nation's ability to govern itself in a way that is responsive to its citizens and representative of its citizens is established. What happens between elections, establishing representative institutions of governance, is just as important as the nation's free determination of who will govern.

Our commission works with partner legislatures to support development of the tools legislators need to establish responsive, effective government. We carry on our work in the sure realization that we do not have all the answers. We know that our own democracy is a work in progress. We do think we have an important story to tell. But we approach each of these legislatures in a true spirit of partnership, learning from them as they learn from us.

We also don't have a corner on the market of democracy promotion, and we coordinate closely with USAID, with the State Department, with other actors in the field to ensure that our efforts complement and enhance theirs.

We have high expectations for the program which we hope to implement in 2007 with the support of this body. During the last 2 years, our focus has been on assessing candidate legislatures and seeking to establish partnerships. Now we plan to move toward consolidating these relationships by expanding and focusing our programming. We plan to conduct advanced seminars on critical legislative capabilities, to enable sustained communications between members and staff of our legislatures, to identify and support pro-democracy reformers in partner legislatures, and to provide small-scale material assistance in cases of significant need.

So, Madam Speaker, let me close by again thanking my colleague Representative DAVID DREIER, the founding chairman of the House Democracy Assistance Commission, thanking him for his leadership. He has led us with vision and with an inclusive spirit. I also want to thank Speaker Pelosi, past Speaker HASTERT, Majority Leader HOYER, Chairman Lantos, Ranking Member Ros-Lehtinen, and many others who have supported the commission and helped bring forward quickly this resolution to get our work going.

I urge my colleagues to support the resolution, which offers Members of this body a promising opportunity to directly contribute to the important work of championing democracy around the world.