

THE MIDDLE EAST PICTURE: ISRAEL, HAMAS & IRAN

On January 9, 2005, Mahmoud Abbas was elected to succeed the late Palestinian Authority (PA) Chairman, Yasser Arafat. On August 23rd, Israel completed its disengagement from the Gaza Strip and four West Bank settlements. Abbas called for an immediate international peace conference with himself as the Palestinian negotiator. In response, an Israeli spokesman cited the Road Map, which does not call for an international conference until its final phase, as the best way to move forward.

I remain interested in the peace talks because of Congress' oversight role in the conduct of U.S. foreign policy and our support for Israel. I, along with most of my colleagues in Congress, have repeatedly endorsed Jerusalem as the undivided capital of Israel, and many Members seek sanctions against the PLO and PA. Despite this fact, Hamas officials have said that, for negotiations to begin, Israel must accept withdrawal from territories occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem, recognize Palestinian refugees' right to return, release prisoners, and dismantle the security wall.

For these reasons, I have supported a bill that restricts aid to the Palestinian Authority, as long as it is controlled by organizations that have ties to terrorism, that refuse to recognize Israel's right to exist, and that do not meet other important criteria. This legislation makes exceptions for humanitarian aid, election monitoring and expenses relating to the Middle East peace process. Some have seen this legislation as a harsh step, but unfortunately, verbal diplomacy has been ignored by Hamas.

I also have cosponsored legislation that tightens sanctions on companies that invest in Iran. This bill's aim is to choke off funds that Iran would use to advance its quest for nuclear weapons. The Iran Freedom Support Act (IFSA) passed the U.S. House of Representatives in late April by a vote of 397 to 21.



Congressman Meek speaks about pending legislative issues affecting Israel during a roundtable discussion at the Michael-Ann Russell Jewish Community Center in March of this year.

Iran must end its pursuit of nuclear weapons and this legislation enforces meaningful sanctions against Iran that will restrict funds to their nuclear program. IFSA makes existing U.S. sanctions against Iran permanent, authorizes support of democratic reformers within Iran, and calls for American investors to divest their holdings in companies invested in Iran's energy sector.

Still, Iran's hardline government insists that its enrichment program is not up for negotiation, constantly rejecting calls from world leaders to suspend the program and begin talks. Iran, the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism, is fast approaching the point of no return on its nuclear program, and I firmly believe they are susceptible to the economic and diplomatic sanctions that I have supported. This legislation provides the necessary political levers to help slow the development of Iran's nuclear program.

THE SACRIFICE IN IRAQ

May 1, 2006 marked the third year after President Bush proclaimed "Mission Accomplished", declaring the official end of major combat operations in Iraq. Yet after three years, over 200,000 of our courageous servicemen and women continue to sacrifice.

As of Memorial Day, nearly 2,500 have sacrificed their very lives, another 18,000 have sacrificed limbs, taken bullets and mortar, and suffered broken bones. By some official estimates, innocent Iraqis themselves have suffered over 37,000 deaths. These tolls continue to mount at a dizzying pace. The mission is clearly far from "accomplished."

Despite the Administration's failure to plan adequately for operations once Saddam Hussein fell, our military and coalition partners have stabilized the situation in Iraq enough for a constitution to be written and for elections to take place. This is a tribute to the Iraqi people and to the American troops who have served to make this possible.

Still, our men and women in uniform are tired, overworked

and ill-equipped. As a member of the House Armed Services Committee, I have fought to raise our total number of troops by 35,000 soldiers and sailors. I also successfully pushed to retain National Guard numbers and to fully fund their equipment needs. My colleagues and I have also increased pay and health benefits for our men and women in uniform.

I have not supported, however, the deployment of our hard-working Guardsmen and women to patrolling the nation's borders in order to keep out immigrants. The proposals to use these men and women in this effort shows a lack of commitment to funding the necessary border patrol agents who are trained for the job. Instead, these proposals will wear our armed forces and the communities from which these men and women come, even thinner.

PREPARE YOUR FAMILY FOR HURRICANE SEASON

As hurricane season begins, citizens should make sure they are prepared. Among the preparations to consider are:

- Develop an evacuation plan with alternate routes to a safe location
- Collect disaster supplies like water, prescription medications, a first aid kit, a flashlight, a portable radio with batteries, extra blankets and sleeping bags, cash, credit cards, and pet food and supplies
- Stock plywood, nails, and other supplies needed to board up windows and protect your home.

Additional information can be found at www.fema.gov.

As a member of the House Homeland Security Committee and Ranking

Member on the Management, Integration and Oversight Subcommittee, I recently worked on legislation that would reorganize FEMA based on the lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina. The bill built on a report that I, along with my other colleagues on the Homeland Security Committee, issued in February 2006. The report, called *Redirecting FEMA Toward Success*, cites the failures of Katrina and offers legislative solutions. Among the solutions included are that the FEMA director have a background in emergency response and report directly to the President in times of a Hurricane Katrina-like incident.

I will continue to address these and other homeland security issues that not only affect our district, but our nation as well.



Rep. Meek, flanked by his colleagues on the Committee on Homeland Security's Subcommittee on Management, Integration and Oversight, listens to testimony during a hearing on the federal government's emergency response efforts. Rep. Meek is Ranking Member of the Subcommittee and has been a leader in the efforts to reform the Federal Emergency Management Agency.



Rep. Meek speaks at a press conference on rising gas prices with Rep. Louise Slaughter of New York. At the April event, Meek announced his support of legislation to combat price gouging at the pump.

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Official Business



Kendrick B. Meek

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Congressman
Kendrick B. Meek **REPORTS** from Washington

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Congressman
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REPORTS FROM WASHINGTON
Florida's 17th Congressional District

Keep in Touch:

Our 17th Congressional District includes portions of North Miami-Dade and South Broward Counties. To serve you better, I maintain three Congressional offices:

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Please feel free to stop by, call, or fax. Also, you can visit my website, kendrickmeek.house.gov, where you can send e-mail to my office or sign up for my E-Meek Update, a periodic e-mail newsletter on important issues that affect South Florida and the nation.

Dear Friend,

There are two sides to the job of a Congressman that are quite different, but equally important.

One involves legislative business in Washington—my work on the Armed Services Committee and the Homeland Security Committee in questioning Administration witnesses, drafting legislation and voting on the House Floor.

My official voting record shows that I have voted on over 97% of the issues before the House in the 109th Congress. For example, among hundreds of amendments and bills, I voted against President Bush's recent tax cut bill, which does little to address the needs of most working Americans, and I voted in favor of an amendment to prevent oil and gas drilling off of Florida's coasts.

The other part of the job goes on in our Miami-Dade and Broward District offices. We call it casework—helping individuals or groups in the 17th Congressional District solve problems with federal agencies that they cannot solve themselves. We use all possible resources to try to solve problems like helping senior citizens with Social Security, veterans with health care, local governments with federal bureaucracies, organizations with grants as well as housing, education, environmental, immigration and other issues.

This newsletter describes just some of my activities in Congress, and I hope that it is of interest to you. Your views and comments on these and other issues of importance to you are welcome at any time.

I appreciate the opportunity to represent you in the U.S. Congress.

Sincerely yours,

Kendrick B. Meek

KENDRICK B. MEEK
Member of Congress

MEEK COSPONSORS RENEWAL OF VOTING RIGHTS ACT

The Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965 is considered one of the most significant civil rights laws ever passed, however critical provisions of this legislation are set to expire in 2007.

In early May, I joined a bipartisan coalition of my colleagues in the House in introducing legislation to extend the VRA for another 25 years. The bill, called the “Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks and Coretta Scott King Voting Rights Reauthorization and Amendments Act of 2006,” will update a number of the original VRA provisions to take into account continuing obstacles to voting and to clarify certain provisions that have been misinterpreted.

I strongly believe that the right to vote is the most sacred right in a democracy. This renewal of current law will extend the federal review of voting practices and procedures in jurisdictions with a history of discrimination, and ensure that bilingual ballots are available for citizens with limited English proficiency.

MEEK SECURES POSTAL DESIGNATION FOR CITY OF MIAMI GARDENS



Congressman Meek, with officials from the City of Miami Gardens, announces that Miami Gardens residents and businesses will finally be able to use their city's name as their address. Rep. Meek fought for this official designation from the United States Postal Service and made the announcement at his Miami Gardens office in early April.

On April 3rd, I had the unique and rare opportunity to mark a significant milestone in the history and development of our community. Since its incorporation a little over three years ago, the City of Miami Gardens has been a beacon of hope and a tremendous source of pride, not just for its residents, but for many throughout South Florida.

Among the aspirations of this

new city was the ability for its residents and businesses to be able to use the name of their city for mail delivery. Such a designation served as a unifying force and additional recognition that Miami Gardens is here to stay and moving forward with purpose and pride.

When the City first asked the USPS for official designation, they were told it was impossible.

In fact, when I initially appealed on behalf of the City, I was also told it could not be done. I am now happy to report that after months of dialogue with postal officials both locally and in Washington, the “impossible” has become reality. Miami Gardens has gained full recognition from the United States Postal Service for all residents and businesses within the City.

MEEK HOSTS HOUSING FAIR TO AID FIRST-TIME HOMEBUYERS

The cost of single-family housing has increased significantly throughout South Florida in recent years. In some areas, property values have kept non-owning members of my District from realizing the American dream of homeownership.



Congressman Meek meets with participants at his “Ten Weeks to Homeownership” housing fair. At the ongoing program, participants attend a number of seminars and meet with credit counselors who are able to help identify a realistic track to homeownership in ten weeks.

To that end, I have adopted a new program called “Ten Weeks to Homeownership.” It is designed to identify persons whose rents are comparable to mortgages and to provide them with the necessary resources to be ready to purchase a home in 70 days. Partnerships with some of our community’s most experienced and committed industry professionals allow all participants of the program to receive one-

on-one credit counseling and sound, home-buying education. Participants that complete the program receive much needed down-payment and closing cost assistance. Best of all, the support participants receive through the “Ten Weeks” program does not end until they close on their very own home.

Since homeownership provides a strong foundation in the creation of intergenerational wealth for our families and our communities, I will hold a number of “Ten Weeks” sessions to ensure that all residents have everything they need to reach the American dream of homeownership.

MAKING A COLLEGE EDUCATION AFFORDABLE

It is astonishing that only two months after some members of Congress voted to raid federal student aid programs by cutting \$12 billion, they came back with the so-called College Opportunity Act (H.R. 609), that does little to help pay for college. I voted against this bill because it does little to address skyrocketing college costs. Instead, I cosponsored H.R. 5150 to substantially help students deal with the increasingly high burden of attending college. This bill cuts interest rates in half for college borrowers on subsidized student loans, from a fixed rate of 6.8% to 3.4%. The bill also cuts rates on loans received for parents of undergraduate students from 8.5% to 4.25%. Under this bill, the typical undergraduate student borrower, with \$17,500 in debt, would save \$5,600 over the life of his or her loans.

STUDENT LOAN ALERT

On July 1, 2006 the interest rates on outstanding federal student loans are expected to rise to over 7 percent and the rate on outstanding federal parent loans to about 7.8 percent. Student borrowers who consolidate before July 1st may be eligible to lock in a rate as low as 4.75 percent, which would save the typical undergraduate borrower almost \$3,500 over the life of his or her loan.



Rep. Meek was recently honored by immigrant advocates for his work in Congress on behalf of immigrants. Meek is pictured with Erns Joseph, a Haitian orphan who Meek, in a three year battle, helped obtain a green card.

MEEK’S HRIFA LANGUAGE ADDED TO SENATE IMMIGRATION BILL

In September of last year, I introduced H.R. 3658, the Haitian Refugee Immigrant Fairness (HRIFA) Improvement Act. The bill would correct two unintentional oversights of the original HRIFA legislation that have left nearly 8,000 Haitians facing deportation. House Republican leaders would not allow this bill to come to the floor of the House, but working with a bipartisan group of Senators, I was able to get my legislation added to the Senate immigration bill.

My legislation is meant to keep hardworking Haitian-American families together, many of whom have lived in the United States for more than a decade.

In early April of this year, working with Senators Nelson (FL), Kennedy (MA) and DeWine (OH), my HRIFA Improvement language was accepted as an amendment to S. 2611, the Senate immigration bill. This legislation has now been approved by the Senate, which is good news, but the differences between the Senate and House-passed versions must be reconciled before the bill can be signed into law by the President.

I will continue to work with my colleagues in both the House and Senate to see that the HRIFA Improvement language is included in the final version of the bill.

MEEK REINTRODUCES LEGISLATION TO COMMEMORATE HAITIAN HERITAGE MONTH

In April of this year, I reintroduced legislation to commemorate the many influences of the Haitian people and culture in America. I think it is important to recognize these contributions that have significantly helped shape our society, but are often overlooked in textbooks and in the minds and hearts of many Americans.

In this bill, H. Res. 777, I detail a few of these major contributions to America. For example, in 1779, Jean Baptiste Point du Sable, a Haitian, built the first permanent settlement of what later became the great city of Chicago, Illinois. And later, in 1803, after expending innumerable resources and troops in a failed effort to suppress Haiti’s revolution, France was forced to give up not only Haiti, its most valuable colonial possession, but also to sell its Louisiana Territory, land that now makes up nearly a quarter of our country.

I hope that the Republican leadership will quickly bring this measure to the floor for the consideration of the House of Representatives, and that my colleagues will join me in recognizing Haiti’s significant contributions to our great American society.