

## Armenia at a crossroads

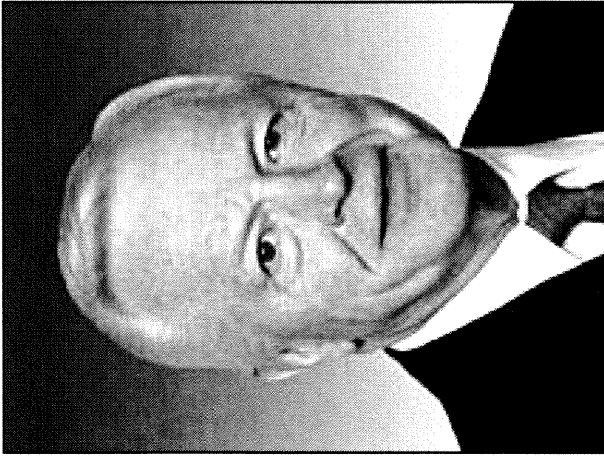
by Rep. Joe Knollenberg

Every year, Congress appropriates billions of dollars in foreign assistance to countries around the world. Last year, Congress approved more \$60 million for economic and military assistance to Armenia. This year, however, the Bush administration requested less than \$30 million.

This drastic cut is simply not justifiable. Throughout the years, Armenia has had many successes. However, Armenia continues to face unique challenges. The goal of U.S. foreign assistance is to aid countries in economic growth, qualitative military advancement, and viability in the global market. Now is not the time to reduce funding as Armenia continues to face economic blockades and military threats.

Armenia is at a crossroads, and United States support for Armenia has never been more important. The country continues to face a dual blockade from Turkey and Azer-

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baijan. Twenty years after the liberation movement in Nagorno-Karabakh the Azeri government is still spewing messages of hate and threatening military action against Ar-

menia. Further, Armenia's neighbor to the south, Iran, continues to be a destabilizing force in the region.

Armenia is a land-locked country with hostile neighbors in one of the most unstable regions in the world. In the face long odds, and with the help of the international community, Armenia has succeeded in growing their democracy, economy, and civil society. U.S. foreign assistance has been critical to this success and to drastically decrease funding now would cut the legs right out from under Armenia.

Due to the strong will of her people and the experience of the government, Armenia has been able to withstand the regional threats, both economic and military. The resilience of Armenia is obvious, but without robust foreign assistance, Armenia will lose footing in the region.

As a senior member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on State and Foreign Operations and as a Member of Congress representing one of the largest Armenian-American communities in the country, I strongly oppose the Administration's suggestion that Armenia's economy could sustain such a large decrease in foreign assistance. By cutting assistance in half, the

Administration is giving up on the progress Armenia has made.

Since its independence Armenia has shed its communist history and embraced democracy. The economy has grown at a steady rate and the rule of law in Armenia continues to be strengthened. Over the past year Armenia has held two successful elections and has won a \$336 million grant from the U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation. Armenia can continue to make great strides like these if the United States continues its investment in the country.

I intend to fight vehemently to ensure U.S. foreign assistance to Armenia is restored and even increased. But I can't do it alone.

Now is the time for the Armenian-American community to stand up and fight for Armenia's standing in the South Caucasus region. The Armenian Diaspora is strong and has a powerful voice both in Washington, D.C. and around the country. I call on the community to advocate for Armenia, call their Members of Congress, and fight back against the cuts to Armenia's foreign assistance.

Together, we can win this battle and ensure Armenia's continued growth and strength. 