

Speech by Rep. Ed Whitfield in the House of Representatives

August 4th 2015

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Kazakhstan and its commitment to nuclear nonproliferation. As the Chairman of the Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Energy and Power, I recognize the complexities of nuclear power and would like to commend Kazakhstan for its leadership helping to prevent the spread of nuclear materials and to advance the responsible, peaceful use of existing civilian nuclear energy.

When it declared independence in 1991, Kazakhstan possessed the fourth largest arsenal of nuclear weapons in the world. By 1993, Kazakhstan had dismantled and secured its entire arsenal and chose to become an international partner in nuclear non-proliferation efforts.

On July 21, 2015, I had the opportunity to meet with His Excellency Kairat Umarov, the Ambassador of Kazakhstan. During the meeting we discussed Kazakhstan's ongoing commitment to these issues. On August 27th, Kazakhstan will partner with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to establish the world's first international fuel bank. This unprecedented facility, planned for nearly a decade, will help prevent the spread of nuclear materials and support the appropriate commercial use of nuclear energy. The fuel bank, controlled by the IAEA and operated in northern Kazakhstan, will maintain a reliable supply of low enriched uranium available to countries if they lose access to fuel supplies for their nuclear power plants.

The LEU Bank will provide a secure, guaranteed supply of nuclear fuel, paving the way for nations to pursue peaceful nuclear power under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) without the need for their own enrichment programs. Given the current global security environment and the recent focus on Iran's nuclear program, the establishment of the LEU Bank could also alleviate concerns that a country's peaceful energy program could be altered to produce weapons grade enriched uranium. As the world continues to explore the potential of nuclear power, we need a solution that removes the threat of enrichment from the peaceful development of nuclear energy.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in congratulating Kazakhstan on this important announcement that will empower nations to unlock the power of nuclear energy, while eliminating the need for domestic enrichment programs that put our safety at risk.