

Testimony of Congressman Sander M. Levin
Before the Committee on Resources,
Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands
Regarding H.R. 562 on June 9, 2005

Chairman Saxton, Ranking Member Christensen and Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today on behalf of H.R. 562. H.R. 562 would allow the Government of Ukraine to donate a memorial in the District of Columbia honoring the victims of the manmade famine that killed millions of Ukrainians in 1932-33. This is important legislation to the 1.5 million Ukrainian-Americans throughout the United States, to the people of Ukraine who have embarked on a courageous effort to build a free, democratic, open society, and indeed to all of us who value freedom.

The famine of 1932-33 resulted from criminal acts and deliberate, criminal decisions by political officials, not from the forces of nature. Yet it is also one of the least known of human tragedies. Despite efforts by the Soviet government at the time and afterward to hide the planned and systematic nature of this famine-genocide, the Ukrainian Diaspora has struggled to preserve its memory.

By introducing unrealistically high quotas on grain and other agricultural products, which were strictly enforced by Red Army troops, the Soviet government deliberately starved 7 to 10 million Ukrainians. The harvest of 1932 was only 12% below 1926-1930 average, but millions of Ukrainians died a slow, agonizing death of hunger.

In his book "The Harvest of Sorrow", British historian Robert Conquest provided a vivid picture of the devastating effects of the Famine-Genocide in Ukraine: "A quarter of the rural population, men, women, and children, lay dead or dying, the rest in various stages of debilitation with no strength to bury their families or neighbors."

This effort was systematic and premeditated. Having sealed the borders of Ukraine to prevent any outward migration or outside relief efforts, the Soviet Union proceeded to confiscate grain and summarily execute anyone found taking even a handful of grain that was considered "social property." The result was devastating, and exactly what the Soviet government intended. Materials now being found in KGB archives have shown the pre-meditated, political nature of the famine.

Nearly a quarter of the Ukrainian rural population paid for their love of freedom with their lives.

The United States and its people must persist in standing with those living under oppressive and tyrannical regimes as they struggle for their freedom. Part of this struggle is to remember the brutal acts of these regimes and their victims. Preventing the recurrence of crimes against humanity such as the Ukrainian Famine-Genocide begins with remembering the tragedies of the past.

That is why I believe it is so important for there to be a monument remembering the millions of innocent victims of this Famine-Genocide. This memorial will not only honor the victims of this horrible period of history, but also serve as a reminder to all of us that we must work together to prevent such tragedies in the future. This reminder is particularly symbolic given the renewed commitment of Ukraine to freedom and democracy as demonstrated during last year's Orange Revolution.

I understand that there is some concern that remembrance of the victims of the Ukrainian Famine-Genocide can be accomplished through the planned Victims of Communism monument. My understanding is that this monument will not be specific as to countries and events. While I appreciate that this monument seeks to recognize the harm done by communism in the broad sweep of history, the Ukrainian Famine-Genocide is a unique tragedy of such immense scope that it stands out even against this record of brutality and oppression. The construction of the Victims of Communism monument should not preclude us from building a memorial to the millions of innocent victims of the Ukrainian Famine-Genocide.

I want to point out that this bill seeks to provide a vehicle for the Government of Ukraine to establish this memorial as a gift to the United States, and specifies that no costs would be incurred by the US government. This tragedy is more than worthy of, it is crucial to, our remembrance. I thank you again for this hearing and urge the members of the subcommittee to support H. R. 562.