



"A New Time, a New Beginning"

Exclusive Interview with Congressman Curt Weldon (R-Pa.)

Honorary Chairman of the American-Russian Chamber of Commerce & Industry

Mr. Weldon, when were you first elected to Congress? What are your major committee assignments?

I was first elected to Congress in 1986. I am a senior member of the House Armed Services Committee and the Science Committee. On the Armed Services Committee, I serve as Chairman of the Procurement Subcommittee, where we oversee nearly \$100 billion in purchasing defense equipment. As a member of the Science Committee, I have worked with my colleagues to introduce legislation that seeks greater protection of our environment, including the health and security of our oceans.

You are one of the most active members of Congress steering US-Russian relations. How and when did you develop an interest in Russia?

As a young adult, I was one of a handful of students who majored in Russian Studies in college. I was also fortunate enough to participate in the American Council of Young Political Leaders exchange programs. These experiences gave me invaluable insight into Russian history, language, culture and spirit of the Russian people.

Please tell us about your proposal on US-Russian cooperation "A New Time, A New Beginning." What prompted you to create this document? What are the key areas of cooperation you propose?

"A New Time, A New Beginning" is a compilation of cooperative efforts. If properly implemented, it would build a holistic relationship that exists between allied nations.

Currently, there exists a will to work more closely with Russia and our Russian counterparts. However, a framework for this cooperation has never been laid out in a written proposal. By creating this framework and highlighting ways that our key institutions can work together on mutually beneficial programs, we have taken an important first step to providing prosperity, stability and peace to both nations and to the world.

"A New Time, A New Beginning" makes recommendations for cooperative efforts in 11 different areas ranging from national security and energy cooperation to space exploration and agricultural programs.

How many times have you been to Russia?

I have been to Russia 29 times and I am planning to make one more trip before the end of this year.

You recently led a congressional delegation trip to Russia. What were the highlights of the trip?

During my most recent trip to Russia in May, I met with two high-ranking Duma deputies who informed me that "A New Time, A New Beginning" was the basis for the Russian proposals discussed in the most recent summit between President Bush and President Putin.

What is the purpose of the Duma-Congress Study Group? Do you participate in its activities?

The purpose of the Duma-Congress Study Group is to match American and

Russian lawmakers together. This group has helped build a greater understanding and invaluable bonds between the leaders from both countries. Since its creation in 1993, nearly 200 members of Congress have met their Duma counterparts.

What are your thoughts about the relationship of Russia with NATO?

Should the Russian government decide they would like become a NATO member, than the US should support its entry into this stabilizing organization.

What is your opinion about elevating Russia out of Jackson-Vanik and promoting Russia's accession to WTO?

Removing Jackson-Vanik as an outdated irritant from our relationship will help foster a needed sense of normal trade relations that has been greatly hindered thanks to the provisions in Jackson-Vanik.

I feel that if Russia can move toward WTO membership, the trade benefits will not only benefit the Russian people, it will strengthen and solidify her market economy.

What are the goals of the US-Russian Information Exchange recently launched by you?

The U.S.-Russian Information Exchange center is an effort to establish a clearinghouse where private and public interests could explore the kinds of opportunities that exist in Russia. Proponents of working more closely with Russia can promote the benefits of cooperation all day long. However, unless we provide an avenue for them to identify these linkages, little can be accomplished without the proper information.

By Kathy Lang