

# **Congressman Lloyd Doggett**

## **Statement for the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe Hearing**

### **“Georgia in 2008: Elections or Street Politics?”**

**February 6, 2008**

I want to thank my colleague, Chairman Alcee Hastings for holding this important hearing on the January 5 Presidential elections in the Republic of Georgia and its ramifications moving forward.

Last month, I had the opportunity to travel with Chairman Hastings to Georgia, to observe the presidential elections on behalf of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). It was there that Chairman Hastings and I, along with other delegations of OSCE monitors, ultimately determined the elections in essence corresponded to OSCE standards but at the same time concluded that the future holds immense challenges for this young democracy.

As an observer in the town of Gori, the birthplace of the Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, I found it quite remarkable to see Georgians turning out to vote against the backdrop of one of the last standing statues of Stalin in the former Soviet Union. This was clearly the first genuinely competitive presidential election in Georgian history, allowing Georgians to express their political choice freely.

This spring Georgians will hold parliamentary elections, which are an important opportunity for political reconciliation. During this time, it is critical that the government address the election's shortcomings, act on recommendations of international observers, and try to find common ground with the opposition – a tall hill to climb, but one that is central to Georgia's future.

The United States can and must play a role in helping the Georgian people build on their country's democratic gains and assist in the consolidation of democracy as Georgia faces challenges within its borders and beyond. We were told that in Georgia, “if it is worth saying at all, it is worth exaggerating.” It is no exaggeration to say that if Georgia can remain on this path, it can become a stable democracy deriving its “just powers from the consent of the governed.”

In closing, I would like to recognize the hard work and dedication of Chairman Hastings, who leads the U.S. Helsinki Commission. Chairman Hastings and Members of the Commission continue the fight for the advancement of human rights and democratic principles – work which unfortunately goes virtually unnoticed by many in Congress.

Mr. Chairman, let me also remark on the work of your exceptional staff. As you know, three of them were with us in Georgia and helped me, personally, before, during, and after our time there.

Thank you again Mr. Chairman for allowing me to participate in today's hearing, I look forward to hearing from our distinguished panel of witnesses.