

Kazakhstan thriving under George Nigh-like president

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EDMOND— “Earl Long is a politician, but he is also a human being.” That statement was made by a black minister in Baton Rouge, La., in 1961 about the then-governor of Louisiana to New Yorker correspondent A.J. Liebling. It is included in Liebling’s classic book on Long, “The Earl of Louisiana.”

And similar sentiments are expressed by the Meskhetian Turk refugees who have been resettled in Oklahoma City regarding the current president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev.

The Meskhetian Turks originally were residents of Georgia, but in 1944 they were deported by Soviet Dictator Joseph Stalin to Soviet Central Asia, and the majority of them continue to reside in in the nations that were created when the Soviet Union collapsed.

And they are often subject to government-sanctioned discrimination and harassment in those places. The governor of the Province of Krasnodor in the Russian Republic, Alexander Tkachev, has demonized the Turks and refused to grant them citizenship despite the fact they are lawfully entitled to it in accordance with the agreement signed by all states that had formerly comprised the Soviet Union. And Tkachev has made several statements that show his hatred of the Turks.

The conditions the Turks have endured in Krasnodor are such that many of them have been granted refugee status by the U.S. government and have been resettled here. But President Nazarbayev has stated publicly the Meskhetian Turks who reside in Kazakhstan are valued members of that nation, and that his government is committed to ensuring all of the diverse ethnic and religious groups there are treated fairly.

The Turks who now reside in Oklahoma City seem to be genuinely perplexed by Nazarbayev’s benevolence, but to an Oklahoman he is recognizable as a leader of the George Nigh variety — one who is committed to improving the lives of all of the citizenry.

When Nigh became Oklahoma’s governor, Oklahoma’s boards and agencies were advised by his office they needed to include the names of women and minorities when they submitted lists of possible appointees to their governing bodies. Similar tales are told of how Nazarbayev has worked quietly to ensure that previously excluded groups are represented in his government.

Lidia Lawson, who is president of the Oklahoma City-based Independent American Center of Political Monitoring Foundation, journeyed to Kazakhstan late last year to monitor that nation’s elections, and she recently discussed her experience there.

Lawson was struck by the fact that Nazabayev is regarded with great affection by most of the citizenry for the stability and prosperity he has brought to Kazakhstan and that there was festive atmosphere throughout the country on election day as people made their way to the polls and gave him another term as president

Lawson also related a comment made to her by a cab driver who seems to demonstrate the goodwill and tolerance that President Nazarbayev has generated. “ We don’t care if you are black or white” he told her, “or if you are Muslim or Russian Orthodox, as long as you are a good person, you are welcome in Kazakhstan.”

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