

into Active Duty in 1941. He was commissioned into the U.S. Army 10 months prior to Pearl Harbor and still carried his original orders to report to Camp Wallace, Texas, until the day he passed away.

During his service in World War II, George served in the European theater, notably in Belgium and France. He served in the 54th Coastal Artillery, a division that had 3,000 African-American soldiers in it.

At the conclusion of the war, Joe was given command of a German prisoner of war camp in Marseilles, France. In an interview with the local newspaper, Joe was quoted as saying: "I started as a commander of Black soldiers, fighting against the world's greatest racist, Adolph Hitler, and finished as the commander of a prison holding German soldiers who had tried to carry out Hitler's plans."

Joe's enlistment lasted 5 years, and he was given orders to go home in February 1946. He also joined the Army Reserve, from which he retired in 1971 with the rank of brigadier general. When he returned to the United States, he went back to work for the Texas Highway Department, embarking on a career that would last for more than 35 years.

Joe worked on numerous projects throughout the State and is best known in College Station for overseeing the completion of the University Drive overpass. On the 50-year anniversary of the opening of that structure, the City of College Station declared March 21 of each year going forward to be Joe Hanover Day.

Texas A&M played a large role in Joe's life, and he was known for his great love of the university. He regularly attended Fightin' Texas Aggie sporting events, especially baseball and football games. When recounting the best days of his life, Joe would routinely tell you that the day he married Lucille and the day he was baptized were the two greatest days of his life.

Mr. Speaker, Joe Hanover fought in service of our country and worked tirelessly to better the Bryan-College Station area. He is loved by our community and certainly left an enduring impression on the Brazos Valley. He will be forever remembered as a hero, community leader, husband, and friend.

My wife, Gina, and I offer our deepest and heartfelt condolences to the Hanover family. We also lift up the family and friends of Joe Hanover in our prayers.

I requested that a United States flag be flown over the Capitol to honor the life and legacy of General Joe Hanover.

As I close today, I urge all Americans to continue praying for our country during these difficult times, for our military men and women who protect us from external threats, and for our first responders who protect us here at home.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. POE) for 30 minutes.

Mr. POE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, tonight I want to talk about persecution, worldwide, of people of the Christian faith. We don't hear much about Christian persecution through world media, and I think it is important that Americans understand that persecution of minority religious groups throughout the world continues, and especially continues against Christians.

Each month, Mr. Speaker, 332 Christians are killed, 214 churches are destroyed, and 772 forms of violence are committed against Christians. Once again, every month, 332 Christians are killed, 214 churches are destroyed, and 772 forms of violence are committed against individuals of the Christian faith.

In 2013, Christians faced persecution in 102 out of 190 countries. For the second year in a row, Christians are the most persecuted religious group in the entire world.

In 2016, 90,000 Christians were killed for their faith worldwide. In 2016, roughly 600 million people were prevented from practicing their faith through intimidation, forced conversions, bodily harm, or even death. Many Christians are brutally murdered simply for their belief in Jesus.

Oppression is not limited to Christians worldwide. Religious minorities throughout the world are restricted in their practices or persecuted for their beliefs. Eighty-two countries, worldwide, require people in minority religious groups in that country to register with the government, while 99 countries restrict their practicing of religion.

Here are the top 10 Christian persecution countries in the world.

It is no surprise that North Korea is number one on the hit list that wants to punish and persecute Christians. Little Kim takes delight in torturing people, especially people of religious beliefs, including Christians. Christians are often sent to prison camps for just owning a Bible. Those Bibles are smuggled in through other countries, but generally they come from South Korea.

Approximately 80,000 to 120,000 are imprisoned in labor camps for their religious beliefs. That is 80,000 to 120,000 people are in prison camps, labor camps, because of their religion in little Kim's dictatorship of North Korea.

So, number one is North Korea. I will give you the other nine, Mr. Speaker.

Somalia is number two; number three is Afghanistan; Pakistan is number four; Sudan is number five. Of the 10 worst countries for Christian persecution, number six, no surprise, is Syria. Iraq is number seven; Iran is number eight; Yemen is number nine; and Eritrea is number 10 of the top 10 countries that persecute Christians for simply believing in the Christian faith.

The Pew Research Council says 95 percent of the countries in the Middle East and North Africa have instances of government harassment or use of force against religious groups; 75 percent had instances of government harassment against even Muslims, people that believe differently than the government faith.

In Asia, there has been an uptick in persecution by governments in Islamic extremism. Christians in this region are targeted by national religious movements—the Muslim, the Hindu, and the Buddhist—in countries like Pakistan, India, and Myanmar. Christians around the world routinely face blasphemy laws for simply speaking about their faith.

A country that I haven't mentioned yet is Communist Vietnam. Yes, Mr. Speaker, whether we leave off that phrase Communist Vietnam, they are still a communist country, an atheistic country. New laws led by the government punish anyone who dares to practice their religion or speak out against the authoritarian regime.

New laws are being used to crack down on citizens' basic human right of the right to believe and practice their religion. New rounds of arrests this year are proof.

Human Rights Watch says 110 people are prisoners of conscience or imprisoned in harsh conditions after unfair trials. These prisoners are not criminals, but the government thinks they are criminals because they practice their religion. They are advocates for human rights and social justice. They are pastors and priests. They are in jail for believing in the Almighty. Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh has been in prison in Vietnam since 2011.

□ 1900

Mr. Speaker, I might add here that prisons in Vietnam haven't changed much over the years. It is still a Communist country, and when you go to jail in Vietnam, you are in a prison like no other. Those prisons still exist, and they house people because the government puts people of Christian faith in jail.

Pastor Nguyen has been tortured and beaten. He has no contact with his family. They give him food, and they make fun of him because in the food they give him, they break up glass and put the glass in that food.

He is being held in solitary confinement, and all because he took a stand for Christianity and he told officials—and he told officials from the United States—about his treatment in jail. The security officials not only give him physical torture, they give him mental torture as well.

His wife has also suffered for her faith. Last year, she was beaten and jailed while peacefully campaigning for religious freedom.

You see, Mr. Speaker, when they go out in Vietnam and advocate the human right of religious freedom, the Government of Vietnam persecutes

them for that—beats them, tortures them, and puts them in jail. Americans need to be aware of what is taking place in this country and others.

His wife suffered for her faith, but she continued to preach the word even against this evil injustice.

Even to this day, the Vietnamese Communists harass her as well as her husband who is incarcerated.

Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim majority nation. But there are communities of Hindus and Christians and Buddhists. These three groups of religious individuals are persecuted because they are not the faith of the government.

There is an alarming shift in tolerance. Indonesia used to claim and be, to some extent, tolerant of other religious faiths other than the Muslim faith. They were proud of that. But there is a shift in the government to not tolerate religious minorities.

Recently, the governor of Jakarta was sentenced to prison for 2 years for blasphemy against the Muslim faith. His charge is based on statements the governor made about the Koran that were seen as offensive to Islam, therefore offensive to the government, and there he goes, off to jail in Indonesia.

Religious tolerance and free speech is being lost, while in Indonesia hard line Islamic forces are encouraging this persecution.

Pakistan. Pakistan is a country I have talked about frequently on this House floor, but Pakistan churches have been bombed and people have been killed.

In one town, a 14-year-old Christian boy, because he was a Christian, was beaten and set on fire. Persecution of the young. Persecution of the elderly. All because of their religious faith.

In Pakistan, Pakistan not only persecutes Christians, they persecute other Muslims who don't agree with the government position on Islam, including the Murji'ah.

In the Middle East, Egypt has recently come under scrutiny because of the increase in attacks from Islamic extremists who target Christians.

In May, gunmen forced Coptic Christian pilgrims from buses, took them out of the buses, and executed 28 of them because they were Coptic Christians.

Palm Sunday this year, twin bombings on Christian churches in Egypt killed almost 50 people. A man cloaked in explosives snuck through security and detonated his bomb, killing 28 and wounding 70.

At the same time, another suicide bomber attacked St. Mark's Church in Alexandria, Egypt, killing another 17 people, and injuring scores more.

Over a 3-day period in 2013, Coptic Christians experienced the worst attack against their churches in 700 years in Egypt. Forty churches were destroyed, and more than 100 other sites were severely damaged.

One boy was beaten to death for wearing a cross around his neck. He is

walking down the street, he has got a cross around his neck, and, lo and behold, he is attacked, beaten to death because of his religious belief.

Tens of thousands of Coptic Christians have fled the country. Well, no kidding. They are leaving because their lives depend on it.

ISIS has decimated ancient Christian communities in the Middle East as well. We have this issue of governments persecuting Christians or allowing persecution to exist. But alongside this, we have this terrorist group ISIS that it is part of their mission wherever they are in the world to kill people who don't agree with their religion. And, of course, that includes Christians as well.

In Iraq, before there was ISIS, there were approximately 300,000 Christians who lived in Iraq. No one knows how many remain today, but hundreds of thousands have left the country or been killed.

In Mosul, for example, 10 years ago, about 35,000 Christians lived in Mosul—10 years ago. Now there are 20, maybe 30 Christians. They have been killed, tortured, or fled the country.

ISIS' campaign to destroy historic sites and monuments of Christians is now something that the world media is talking about. ISIS destroyed the monastery of St. Elijah outside Mosul. This monastery stood there in Mosul for 1,400 years, and here comes the terrorist group ISIS that tears it down because it is a site where Christians practiced Christianity.

ISIS has been so fervent in their killing of Christians that this House even passed legislation stating that ISIS is committing genocide against Christians. And they are.

So you got ISIS in different parts of the world. One of their goals is to kill religious folks who disagree with them, especially Christians. And to some extent, they have been very successful at that.

When we talk about destroying and eliminating ISIS, we need to remember that we will eliminate their genocide against Christians as well, if we destroy ISIS.

In Iran, Open Doors USA ranked the persecution level of Christians in Iran as extreme. Religious police move about the city kind of like the Gestapo, and when they suspect Christians are gathering for worship, they raid the homes, arrest the leaders, and destroy Bibles. That is what the religious police, the Gestapo police as I call them, in Iran do.

Iranians who come to study in the United States and become a Christian, they can't go back to Iran. They go back to Iran, Iran puts them in jail, and they suddenly disappear. Converts to Christianity face charges of apostasy and possible death sentences if they ever return. People who become Christians in Iran, who make that choice as a believer, also know that their days are numbered in Iran if the religious police catch them.

In Libya, the Islamic State captured and beheaded 21 people because they were Christians. I don't think that we should be insensitive to this act of beheading folks altogether because of their religious faith. We shouldn't be insensitive because it continues on in Libya as well.

In Libya, where they murdered the 21 people, the victims' families wanted to build a church in their honor. Well, as they were building the church, they were beaten by people who were of the Muslim faith to make sure that that church did not exist. And that is Libya.

In Syria, the head of the Franciscans in the Middle East has reported that of the 4,000 inhabitants of the village of Ghassanieh, no more than 10 people remain in that town, and they have been killed by Assad's thugs and the militant groups like ISIS. Christians have really got it bad in Syria because everybody is after them. You got ISIS that is after them, and then you got Assad the dictator, the brutal dictator, he kills them as well.

Moving on, I want to mention Russia. Russia seems to be something everybody wants to talk about. Why don't we talk about Russia and what they are doing to Christians today.

I went to the Soviet Union back in the 1980s, when it was the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union persecuted people who were religious at all. I mean, if you owned a Bible, you are going to jail. If you tried to worship, you are going to jail. They constantly did that under the Soviet regime of people of any religious faith. Primarily it was Orthodox Christians, and it was also Jews.

The wall came down, and now we have Putin in charge. The world needs to understand that Putin is moving in the direction of persecuting people of religious beliefs just like when he was a member of the KGB under the Soviet Union. Putin. I call him the Napoleon of Siberia. So what are they doing?

Well, they are starting out with laws requiring missionaries to have a permit, and they make house churches illegal. What is a house church? A house church is where two or three are gathered together in a house in the Lord's name and try to worship. You can't do that. That is against the law.

If you are going to worship, you have to get a permit to worship in a structured building, and only certain religious groups get a permit to even practice any religion. That is difficult in itself. So you have to be in a structured building approved by the government, and that particular denomination or religious faith has to have a permit to do so.

If you are in Russia, you cannot practice religion online. You know, that online happens all over the world except if you are in Russia, you are not going to be able to promote any type of religion or you are going to jail. This is the greatest threat to Christianity in Russia since the Soviet days. We haven't heard much about that. We

have heard other things, but this is something that we need to be aware of, the persecution of people because of religious faith.

One of my daughters recently went to Russia, and she experienced and saw this very thing that I am talking about. No home church worship services, only structured buildings where you have the Russian police watching what takes place. So they are moving in a direction like they were under the Soviet days of persecuting people who have religious faith.

Putin is taking Khrushchev's—I am older than you are, Mr. Speaker. I remember when Khrushchev was here. He made the comment when he was the dictator of the Soviet Union that Christianity will never exist in the Soviet Union. It cannot. I don't think it can be legislated out, but Khrushchev was determined to make sure that Christianity and other religious faiths did not exist in the Soviet Union. Of course, I believe it will continue whether or not Christians are persecuted anyway.

Mr. Speaker, how much time do I have left?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman has 12 minutes remaining.

Mr. POE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I have always thought that people from Texas should get more time because we talk slower, and might even think slower. But, anyway, I appreciate the 12 minutes, and I will use it.

Mr. Speaker, I am a cosponsor, and other Members are cosponsors, of a bill that will provide expedited visa protection and processing for Christians and Yazidi refugees from the Middle East. They are targets of genocide in Iraq, Syria, Pakistan, Iran, and Libya, and we hope to expedite visas for those people who are trying to flee religious persecution.

Hopefully, the President of the United States will address the issues of human rights violations in Vietnam. Members of Congress, including myself, have asked the President to address this when he deals with the country of Vietnam.

And, of course, there is other legislation sponsored by Mr. TRENT FRANKS from Arizona which calls upon the U.S. to use its influence in the United Nations to condemn the ongoing sexual violence against women and children of religious faith.

These young women and girls are being sexually assaulted because of their religious faith or their religious beliefs. A lot of that is being done by ISIS.

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Mr. Speaker, just a couple of other things.

Watchdog groups report that each month 332 Christians are killed by their faith and 214 churches and Christian properties are destroyed. Of course Christians, like other religious minorities, have been persecuted for years. A little history is in order here, Mr. Speaker.

In this country, we have religious freedom. We are a nation that believes that all people should have religious freedom.

When our Forefathers got together and they declared independence from Great Britain, which we will celebrate next Tuesday, and they got together and they wrote the Constitution, they added 10 Amendments to the Constitution.

The First Amendment of the Constitution is not first by accident. It is first because it is the most important of all rights, and there are five rights in the First Amendment. The first right in the First Amendment is the most important right. Here is what it is, and I will read just a portion of the Constitution, Mr. Speaker: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Religious freedom is the number one right of Americans. It doesn't just say to believe what you want to believe. It says you have the right to practice it, to get out there and practice it, even in public, number one.

Number two, "Congress shall make no law . . . prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress. . . ."

There are five rights in the First Amendment. The first one: religious freedom.

Many, many people came to this new world seeking religious freedom. That is why they came here, primarily Christian religious freedom. They were being persecuted in Europe. They came to the United States and made sure that we do not persecute people of religious faith.

The opposite is true. It is a right. I feel very strongly, as I think most people do, that it is the first right, and it is the most important right. And it is a human right. It is not just a right for Americans. It is a right for all people.

People in Syria, Iran, North Korea, Yemen, and all those countries I mentioned, those people—who we don't know who they are—have the right, the human right, of religious freedom. That is a basic right of all people everywhere. I hope that we as a people encourage other people and governments throughout the world: Let folks worship the way they want to worship because it is a human right, and, I believe, that we have gotten it from the Almighty.

And the last thing I would comment on is we need to be careful in this country that we don't end up persecuting by legislation or by the judiciary, infringing upon the First Amendment, the first right, of the free exercise of religion. That is a story for another day, Mr. Speaker.

So, as we get close to the Fourth of July, the Declaration of Independence—our ancestors got together and said they wanted freedom, and they

pledged to themselves and to others their sacred honor. Many of them lost everything, the war between us and England, the biggest and most powerful empire that had ever existed. It took over 7 years, but it was worth it.

That is why the Fourth of July is important, because it is a declaration of independence. And it is also, as Thomas Jefferson said in the Declaration of Independence, a statement of human rights—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and that governments are instituted among men to secure those rights.

Mr. Speaker, on the Fourth of July, we need to remember our country, remember the people who lived here and gave us this country, and it is our job to make sure we keep it.

And that is just the way it is.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

DEVASTATING IMPACTS ILLEGAL MARIJUANA GROW OPERATIONS ARE HAVING ON OUR NATION'S PUBLIC LANDS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. LAMALFA) for 30 minutes.

Mr. LAMALFA. Mr. Speaker, I have a presentation here, but, first, I yield to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), my friend, who has a very important topic to cover as well. I appreciate his friendship and his strong leadership on the things that really count around here.

LIU XIAOBO RESOLUTION

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my very good friend from California for his graciousness in yielding me this time and for his wonderful work as a Member of Congress on human rights and pro-life issues. I thank him for that leadership.

Mr. Speaker, tonight, I rise and note to my colleagues that the news of Nobel Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo's diagnosis of terminal liver cancer was a jarring shock to everyone who admires this champion of freedom and democracy.

Tonight, the House has under consideration an urgent resolution, a truly urgent resolution, H. Con. Res. 67, which I introduced, joined by Ms. PELOSI, and several of the members of the Foreign Affairs Committee, she and I together, some bipartisanship in a place where we have had little of it lately. But here we are joined, and we are joined very strongly on behalf of Liu Xiaobo and his dire, dire situation, and that of his wife.

The legislation urges the Government of the People's Republic of China to unconditionally release Liu Xiaobo, together with his wife, Liu Xia, to allow them to freely meet with friends, family, and counsel, and seek medical treatment wherever they desire.

The operative language of the resolution makes it very clear that it recognizes Liu Xiaobo for his decades of