

HONORING CAPTAIN SCOTT T. FARR'S TWENTY-EIGHT YEARS OF SERVICE TO HIS COUNTRY IN THE UNITED STATES NAVY

HON. JOE COURTNEY

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 24, 2020

Mr. COURTNEY. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize and congratulate Navy Captain Scott "Topper" Farr for his twenty-eight years of faithful service to our country.

In May of 1992, CAPT Farr was commissioned as an Ensign and proceeded to Pensacola, FL for flight training. After earning his gold wings, he flew both the EA-6B Prowler and EA-18G Growler jets operationally, practicing his specialty of electronic warfare. His responsibility was protecting U.S. and coalition aircraft from the threat of surface to air missiles, as well as soldiers, Sailors, airmen and Marines on the ground from improvised explosive devices. His dedicated service through eight deployments, 3,409 flight hours and 669 carrier landings on eight different aircraft carriers was responsible for countless American and Allies' lives saved during Operations Southern Watch, Allied Force, Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom and Unified Protector.

In addition to commanding Electronic Attack Squadron 140 and the Electronic Attack Wing, U.S. Pacific Fleet, his ultimate assignment was as the Director of the Navy's House Liaison Office. In this job, he both represented the Navy to most House members and oversaw the numerous congressional and staff delegation trips that we annually execute across the globe. These crucial trips are beneficial for members and staff to achieve a deeper understanding of the issues facing our Navy and its Sailors, as well as strategic issues facing our nation. It was on these CODELs that I came to know Topper for the good-natured and stalwart professional that he is.

Two events that highlight Topper's work ethic and professionalism immediately come to my mind. The first was an extremely successful bi-partisan CODEL across Australia from Perth to Alice Springs to Sydney. Topper handled all of the logistical and diplomatic tasks flawlessly in what the Australian embassy noted was the largest group of House and Senate members to visit Australia since World War II. Second was an anti-submarine focused CODEL of NATO countries. During both of these CODELs, it wasn't CAPT Farr's superb planning or execution skills that most impressed me and my colleagues. It was his ability to substantively answer questions from members on a wide range of military issues. This knowledge was no doubt based on his impressive record of service and simply stated, the U.S. House of Representatives and the Navy are better off due to his service.

As CAPT Farr embarks on a new chapter in life, it is my hope that he may recall, with a deep sense of pride and accomplishment, the outstanding contributions he has made to the United States Navy while attached to the Office of Legislative Affairs. I would like to send him, his wife Melanie, daughter Kathleen and one of a kind dog Gracie, my very best wishes for continued success in his future.

ONGOING TRANSATLANTIC ENGAGEMENT THROUGH THE OSCE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

HON. RICHARD HUDSON

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 24, 2020

Mr. HUDSON. Madam Speaker, I rise today to highlight my recent efforts to engage with our allies across Europe to address the current political turmoil in Belarus and seek a way forward.

On September 23, I joined a video call of the leadership of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE PA), where I serve as Chairman of the Committee on Political Affairs and Security. Joining us for the discussion were the Head of the Belarusian delegation to the OSCE PA, Mr. Andrei Savinykh, and the leader of the Belarusian opposition and former presidential candidate, Ms. Svetlana Tikhonovskaya.

Ms. Tikhonovskaya shared with us the long struggle of the people of Belarus for their rights under President Alexander Lukashenko's 26-year authoritarian rule. The fraudulent presidential election on August 9, in which Lukashenko claimed he "won" with over 80 percent of the vote, led thousands of Belarusians across the country to come out into the streets. They risk physical harm and imprisonment to demand free and fair elections and the release of political prisoners. Unfortunately, these individuals have been met with brute force from the authoritarian regime. They continue to injure and detain protestors, journalists, and even bystanders on a massive scale. Instances of torture in detention have been reported, and some have been killed. Lukashenko is clearly afraid for his political future. In another desperate move, he recently held an illegal, early "inauguration" in an attempt to consolidate his illegitimate power.

I strongly condemned Lukashenko's violent repression of Belarusians and express solidarity for their desire to choose their own leadership in a democratic and transparent manner and to exercise their fundamental freedoms without fear of violent repercussions or harassment. During our meeting, I noted two particular cases that we in the United States are watching closely. U.S. citizen Vitali Shkliarov, who was in Belarus visiting family, was unjustly detained in July and languishes in a Belarusian prison since the end of July. We are concerned for his welfare and I called for his release.

I also mentioned that the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Minsk-Mogilev, Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, has been denied re-entry to Belarus after a visit abroad, even though he is a citizen. He has openly criticized the government's use of violence against peaceful people, including the detention of priests and clergy, and we fear that this too is a political act on the part of Lukashenko and an infringement on religious freedom.

The future of Belarus belongs to its people, and, as Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has emphasized, this path should be "free from external intervention." Indeed, my colleagues in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly understand that it is not our place to choose the leadership of Belarus, but to use the unique role of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly as

a representative body to foster authentic dialogue, prevent and resolve conflict, and hold each other accountable. As an OSCE participating State, Belarus has an obligation to abide by the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act, including those on human rights and fundamental freedoms. I am pleased that 17 participating States of the OSCE, including the United States, have invoked the Moscow Mechanism, which will establish a mission of independent experts to look into the particularly serious threats to the fulfillment of human rights commitments in Belarus. The report that the mission issues will hopefully offer us greater insight into the situation in Belarus and recommendations for future actions.

It is a privilege, through the U.S. Helsinki Commission, to represent the United States Congress in the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE. The Parliamentary Assembly provides Members of Congress with a unique, bipartisan opportunity to work with our friends and allies to help resolve pressing global issues while promoting our shared values. Because the Parliamentary Assembly includes representatives of Belarus and our European allies, it is uniquely suited to address the human rights and security implications of the moment in Belarus.

Madam Speaker, please join me today in calling for an end to violence and mass detentions in Belarus and recognizing the importance of continued Congressional engagement with the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE.

RECOGNIZING THE RETIREMENT OF BILL VERNER

HON. AUSTIN SCOTT

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 24, 2020

Mr. AUSTIN SCOTT of Georgia. Madam Speaker, today I rise in recognition of Bill Verner, Executive Vice President of the Georgia EMC. After decades of dedicated service, Bill is retiring from his position at the Georgia EMC on the 40th anniversary of beginning his career in the electric cooperative industry.

Bill began his career with Carroll EMC while working his way through college. He joined the Georgia EMC in 1984, began working in government relations in 1986, and was appointed to lead Georgia EMC's efforts in the state legislature and regulatory arena in 1996.

His strong beliefs in the cooperative's principles are evident in his years of dedicated service representing EMC's interests in the Georgia General Assembly, Congress, and state and federal agencies. Having worked with Bill personally, I have seen firsthand the level of expertise and commitment that has made him an invaluable asset to the cooperative. His hard work, leadership, and deep understanding of America's most successful public-private partnership, the electric cooperative business model, has benefitted EMC members throughout Georgia.

Bill's career is marked by his many contributions to Georgia EMC and the 41 EMCs across the state. His tenure over the past four decades with Georgia EMC makes him one of the longest-serving employees in the association's eighty-year history. In today's age, it is a rarity to find the combination of character, ability, and commitment that Bill exemplifies.