

THANKS TO MEMBERS FOR HELP WITH FREEDOM FROM RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. WOLF) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Speaker, last week, the House of Representatives passed the Freedom From Religious Persecution Act, H.R. 2431, by an overwhelming vote.

I wanted to share with my colleagues a letter from Wei Jingsheng, one of China's most noted political dissidents, who was watching in the gallery the vote and who was also watching on television in another Member's office, who said that the vote on H.R. 2431 was, and I quote, "a blow sent to oppression and a vote for freedom." He went on to say, "I am encouraged by the friends in the United States Congress and it gives hope to all those struggling on behalf of Chinese."

Mr. Speaker, I want to personally thank the 375 Members who helped send this message of hope.

But, passing H.R. 2431 in the House of Representatives would not have been possible without the help, though, of many, many people. I want to take this opportunity to thank the men and women here on Capitol Hill who worked long and hard to move forward this bill. I am grateful for their dedication.

I would especially like to thank Steve Rademaker, Chief Counsel of the House Committee on International Relations; Joseph Rees, Staff Director and Chief Counsel on the Subcommittee on International Operations on Human Rights; Brian Gunderson, Deputy Chief of Staff for the Majority Leader; Heidi Stirrup, Policy Advisor to the Majority Leader; and Gardner Peckham, Foreign Policy Advisor to the Speaker.

I also appreciate the tireless efforts of Carolyn Bartholomew with the office of the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI), Bob Zachritz with the office of the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. HALL), and Steve Golob and Rick Kessler with the office of the gentleman from California (Mr. BERMAN), Mark Lagon with the office of the gentleman from California (Mr. COX), and Amos Hochstein with the office of the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. GEJDENSON).

Finally, I want to express my appreciation to Anne Huiskes, my senior legislative assistant, who has worked for over a year to bring this bill to the floor, pouring her heart and her soul into this effort to help make a difference in the lives of the persecuted people of all faiths around the world.

I deeply appreciate all of the efforts of the many people, some named and many more unnamed, who helped pass this important piece of legislation on behalf of those around the world who really have no other voice.

As Wei Jingsheng said, passing H.R. 2431 sent a positive message to op-

pressed people everywhere. Your work here in the Congress helped send this message, and I am truly grateful.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. WOLF. I yield to the gentleman from California.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WOLF). He has thanked a lot of people, and I think people across America and around the world should know that a piece of legislation like this does not just come about without persistence, without passion, and without leadership.

In the 6 years that I have been here, he has led the way, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WOLF), for speaking about human rights and preservation of human rights, freedom from religious persecution, all over the world. We are grateful for him and for his leadership. This would not have passed without him, and we are all grateful to him.

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for his comments.

VIOLATION OF RIGHTS OF CHAPLAIN WILLIE WILLIAMS AND COMDR. CHERYL WASHINGTON

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, last week, my friend and colleague, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. RUSH) spoke to us in this Chamber about the unfair treatment of two dedicated Navy officers, Chaplain Willie Williams and Lt. Commander Cheryl Washington. Simply stated, this case is a tragedy. It is a tragedy in all aspects.

The first tragedy was the heinous assault, a gang rape, that occurred at Miramar Naval Air Station in San Diego. Lives have been altered, changed and ruined. And only through tremendous faith and human will can this incident, this crime, ever be reckoned with and overcome.

The next tragedy was the treatment of a Navy Chaplain who only wanted to tell the truth. Someone who only tried to do what was right and just. Someone who saw wrong and tried to right it, who tried to make sure that justice prevailed. Yet, he also became a victim.

The next tragedy, the one that is most disappointing, the one I hope that can be rectified, is the tragedy of the response of the United States Navy.

The brave men and women of our Nation join the military services for many different reasons. Some join because they want an education, and they see the military as a way to break the bonds of poverty and to better themselves. Some join because they seek an adventure, an adventure that is not available to them in the small town where they live, or the crime-ridden streets of their city, or the mundaneness of their neighborhoods.

Some join to "be all that they can be." They want to prove to themselves that they are able to meet the physical, mental, and emotional challenges. Others join because they want to belong to a group, a group that has a purpose. There are as many reasons to join our Nation's military as there are people who have signed up.

Mr. Speaker, there is one underlying reason that is shared by all the enlisted personnel and officers who currently serve, who have ever served, and who sit today at a school desk and dream of serving. They all love this country, and they all want to see that America stays strong, independent and free. They all believe that they can make a difference in this country and that their best opportunity for making that difference is through serving our country by helping to defend it against aggression.

That is why this case is so sad and heartbreaking.

Chaplain Willie Williams, Lieutenant Commander Cheryl Washington, and scores of others have been let down, have been treated unfairly and unjustly, have been abused, and have been betrayed. They have been betrayed by the people who they served with, the people they trusted to do what was right, the people they willingly allowed to lead them, whom they willingly would follow into battle. If this continues much further, Mr. Speaker, they will have been betrayed by the institution that they loved, the United States Navy.

I was first contacted by Chaplain Willie Williams in January of this year. He had some very serious allegations to make. He claimed that a young woman had been sexually assaulted numerous times and that, when he reported this, he himself became the subject of investigation, and that the subsequent investigation was conducted with a complete lack of integrity, thoroughness, and efficiency.

I found this allegation, Mr. Speaker, very troubling. I represent a "Navy town." Many of you in this body have made official trips to San Diego to review our naval facilities there. There is no better Naval port in the world and no place where the quality of life for the men and women serve in the Navy is better. Thousands of Navy personnel retire to San Diego. In short, the Navy has been good to San Diego, and San Diego has been good to the Navy.

Whenever I am approached by anyone who tells of a Navy injustice, I tend to be skeptical. I want to believe the Navy, Mr. Speaker; but, with this case, there is something that was just not right. There was something that did not ring true.

I hope that this case is not over. Chaplain Williams has been court martialed. But he tried to do the right thing. He tried to stand up for fair play, he tried to stand up for justice, and he tried to stand up for the truth. I hope the Navy has not ignored these and chosen to follow a path that is littered with racial discrimination, yes,