

The Department of Veterans Affairs is the second largest federal agency in terms of employees, with over 220,000 dedicated men and women providing a range of vital benefits and services for veterans around the country. The VA operates the largest integrated health network in the world, comprised of 163 medical centers, over 800 Community Based Outpatient Clinics, 135 nursing homes, 43 domiciliarys and 73 comprehensive home-care programs. The VA continues to provide quality care to millions of veterans, their families and their survivors.

In addition, the VA operates one of the most important medical research programs in the world, with more than 15,000 research projects at 115 VA medical centers. The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is on the cutting edge of research on matters ranging from brain trauma to hepatitis C to Alzheimer's disease. The VHA also pays particular attention to the wounds and illnesses of soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen, and recently opened two new Centers for the Study of War-Related Illnesses, one in Washington, DC, and the other in my home state of New Jersey.

The Department of Veterans Affairs maintains a national network of veterans' cemeteries for our nation's veterans, consisting of 119 national cemeteries in 39 states and Puerto Rico and also administers six life insurance programs with 2.2 million policies in force having a face value of \$22 billion.

The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), created as part of the new Department of Veterans Affairs, oversees a myriad of benefits programs for veterans, including disability compensation, education and training, job placement, home loans, and life insurance. Over 2.7 million veterans receive disability compensation payments for wounds or illnesses resulting from their service to our nation, and an additional 570,000 widows, children and surviving parents of deceased veterans also receive monthly benefit payments.

Mr. Speaker, the VA also operates the GI Bill program, which has provided college education and training to more than 20 million veterans since its creation in 1944. This historic program not only changed the way America looked at veterans benefits, it also changed the nature of higher education and helped to create the modern middle class. In addition, the VA operates the veterans home loan program, which has helped over 16 million former servicemen and women buy their own homes.

Since the creation of the original Veterans Administration in 1930, our nation has recognized the unique contributions and sacrifices of the men and women who have defended our freedom at home and abroad. Today, the Department of Veterans Affairs, ably led by Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi, continues to provide the benefits and services that our nations veterans have earned.

On the wall outside the VA's main office in Washington, DC, the words of President Abraham Lincoln are engraved on the building: "To care for him who have borne the battle, and his widow and his orphan." This is the mission that draws so many committed men and women to the VA.

Mr. Speaker, it is an honor for me to work on behalf of our nation's veterans and I want to pay tribute to the Department of Veterans Affairs, and especially all of their gifted and dedicated employees, on the 13th anniversary

of their becoming a full Cabinet Department of the federal government.

GIRL SCOUTS

HON. HEATHER WILSON

OF NEW MEXICO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 14, 2002

Mrs. WILSON of New Mexico. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in support of a world-class organization that has achieved world-class results.

Founded in 1912 on the simple belief that all girls should be given the opportunity to develop physically, mentally, and spiritually, Juliette Gordon Low assembled a meeting of 18 girls in Savannah, GA. Today, the Girl Scouts of the USA has grown into an organization with membership numbering 3.8 million, far and away the largest organization for girls in the world.

I would especially like to praise the Girl Scouts of Chaparral Council, the local Girl Scout troop from my home district. Chartered in 1958 and serving over 6,000 girls and 2,000 adult volunteers, the Girl Scouts of Chaparral Council have been teaching girls in my district the ideals of character, conduct, and patriotism for almost 45 years. Organizations like the Girl Scouts of Chaparral Council that make me proud to represent the citizens of the first district of New Mexico.

The Girl Scouts of the USA is the world's preeminent organization dedicated solely to girls, where in a positive, nurturing environment, girls build character and skills for success in the real world. In partnership with committed adult volunteers, girls develop qualities such as strong moral values, leadership, a social conscience, and conviction about their own potential and self worth—values that will serve them well the rest of their lives.

Being involved with Girl Scouts enables girls to develop self-confidence and expertise, take on responsibility, think creatively, and act with integrity. Girl Scouts learn the characteristics essential being good citizens and great leaders.

The U.S. Congress chartered the Girl Scouts of the USA on March 16th, 1950, and at present, there is a "Troop Capitol Hill" made up entirely of Congresswomen who are honorary members.

For 90 years, Girl Scouts of the USA has had a proven track record of empowering girls to become leaders, helping adults become positive role models and mentors for children, and helping to build strong communities. Girl Scouts of the USA truly is a place "where girls grow strong!"

EVIDENCE IN CHITHISINGPHORA FAKED, GOVERNMENT ADMITS

HON. DAN BURTON

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 14, 2002

Mr. BURTON of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, back in March 2000, just before former President Clinton visited India, 35 Sikhs were massacred in the village of Chithisingphora in Kashmir.

At the time, many people accused the Indian government of this atrocity while the Indian government laid the blame on Pakistani-sponsored militants. A study by the Movement Against State Repression (MASR) and the Punjab Human Rights Organization (PHRO) showed that the Indian government's own forces had killed these innocent Sikhs, a conclusion confirmed by a study from the international Human Rights Organization (IHRO) and by an article in the New York Times Magazine by Barry Bearak. Yet the Indian government maintained the fiction that Pakistanis carried out the massacre. They killed five young Kashmiris, claiming they were responsible, then were force to admit that they were not. Then five other Kashmiris were arrested and charged with the crime.

On March 8, Reuters news service reported that the chief minister of Kashmir, Farooq Abdullah, admitted that the evidence against these Kashmiris was faked. That's right, Mr. Speaker, the "world's largest democracy" faked evidence to falsely convict some Kashmiris of the massacre of these Sikhs in order to set these two minorities against each other. Fortunately, it has not worked. Last year, some Indian troops were caught red-handed trying to set fire to a Gurdwara and some Sikh homes in Kashmir and they were overwhelmed by Sikh and Muslim villagers.

Remember also, Mr. Speaker, that the ruling BJP is part of a militant Hindu nationalist organization the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), which published a booklet last year on how to implicate minorities in false criminal cases.

Given the government's admission of fraud in this case, how many other cases have they faked? They admit to holding 52,268 Sikhs as political prisoners, according to a MASR report. Amnesty International says that tens of thousands of other minorities are also being held as political prisoners in "the world's largest democracy." How many cases have been faked against these prisoners?

Mr. Speaker, it is shameful that the evidence in the Chithisingphora massacre was faked, and it is shameful that it needed to be. However, the people who carry out atrocities like this massacre are rarely if ever punished. Instead, the state either finds scapegoats like the five Kashmiris it is currently holding or it does nothing. It has found a scapegoat in the killing of Graham Staines, even though every report at the time reported that a mob of people chanting Hindu slogans burned Mr. Staines and his two sons. No one has been punished in the murder of former Akal Takht Jathedar Gurdev Singh Kaunke or in the kidnapping and murder of Jaswant Singh Khalar, who was killed in police custody.

I call on the Indian government to punish those who tampered with the evidence in this case immediately. I also call on the United States to cut off aid with India until they allow people to enjoy basic human rights and a fair, impartial system of justice. We should also press for a free and fair plebiscite on independence for the people of Khalistan, Kashmir, Nagaland, and the other countries seeking their freedom. That is only way to protect their rights and end this kind of abuse.