

Finally, recognizing that our military is dependent on a robust recruiting operation, I give my full support for H. Con. Res. 354. To preserve an all volunteer military service, it is essential that recruiters be granted access to the best and brightest American students. Service in the military is an honorable position and without our Armed Services, we would not have the academic freedoms that have made our Nation so advanced in culture and science.

I recently had the pleasure of recognizing New Jersey's Fifth District nominees to the U.S. Service Academies. Not all students have that honor, but all students should have the option of learning more about this noble profession from qualified Armed Forces recruiters.

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

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) that the House suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill, S. 1184.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the Senate bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

EXPRESSING THE SENSE OF CONGRESS THAT THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION SHOULD FULLY PROTECT THE FREEDOMS OF ALL RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES WITHOUT DISTINCTION

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 190) expressing the sense of the Congress that the Russian Federation should fully protect the freedoms of all religious communities without distinction, whether registered and unregistered, as stipulated by the Russian Constitution and international standards.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. CON. RES. 190

Whereas the Russian Federation is a participating State of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and has freely committed to fully respect the rights of individuals, whether alone or in community with others, to profess and practice religion or belief;

Whereas the Russian Federation specifically committed in the 1989 Vienna Concluding Document to "take effective measures to prevent and eliminate discrimination against individuals or communities on the grounds of religion or belief" and to "grant upon their request to communities of believers, practicing or prepared to practice their faith within the constitutional framework of their States, recognition of the status provided for them in the respective countries";

Whereas Article 28 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation declares "everyone shall be guaranteed the right to freedom of conscience, to freedom of religious worship, including the right to profess, individually or jointly with others, any religion" and Article 8 of the 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations provides

for registration for religious communities as "religious organizations," if they have at least 10 members and have operated within the Russian Federation with legal status for at least 15 years;

Whereas registration is critical for religious groups to fully enjoy their religious freedoms, as many rights and privileges afforded to religious communities in the Russian Federation are contingent on obtaining registration;

Whereas many religious groups refuse to seek registration on theological or other grounds, while other communities have been unjustly denied registration or had their registration improperly terminated by local authorities;

Whereas many of the unregistered communities in the Russian Federation today were never registered under the Soviet system because they refused to collaborate with that government's anti-religious policies and they are now experiencing renewed discrimination and repression from the authorities;

Whereas over the past 2 years there have been an estimated ten arson attacks on unregistered Protestant churches, with little or no effective response by law enforcement officials to bring the perpetrators to justice;

Whereas in some areas of the Russian Federation law enforcement personnel have carried out violent actions against believers from unregistered communities peacefully practicing their faith; and

Whereas the United States has sought to protect the fundamental and inalienable human right to seek, know, and serve God according to the dictates of one's own conscience, in accordance with the international agreements committing nations to respect individual freedom of thought, conscience, and belief: Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That it is the sense of the Congress that the United States should—*

(1) urge the Russian Federation to ensure full protection of freedoms for all religious communities without distinction, whether registered and unregistered, and end the harassment of unregistered religious groups by the security apparatus and other government agencies;

(2) urge the Russian Federation to ensure that law enforcement officials vigorously investigate acts of violence against unregistered religious communities, as well as make certain that authorities are not complicit in such attacks;

(3) continue to raise concerns with the Government of the Russian Federation over violations of religious freedom, including those against unregistered religious communities, especially indigenous denominations not well known in the United States;

(4) ensure that United States Embassy officials engage local officials throughout the Russian Federation, especially when violations of freedom of religion occur, and undertake outreach activities to educate local officials about the rights of unregistered religious communities;

(5) urge both the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chair-in-Office on Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination, also focusing on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians and Members of Other Religions, and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief to visit the Russian Federation and raise with federal and local officials concerns about the free practice of unregistered religious communities; and

(6) urge the Council of Europe and its member countries to raise with Russian Federation officials issues relating to freedom of religion, especially in light of the Russian Federation's responsibilities as President of the Council in 2006.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) and the gentleman from California (Mr. LANTOS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

H. Con. Res. 190 expresses the sense of the Congress that the Russian Federation should fully protect the right of its people to worship and practice their faith as they see fit. This freedom is the right of all religious communities without distinct, whether registered or unregistered, and that is stipulated by the Russian Constitution and by international standards.

Yet I am sorry to report religious freedom for minority religious communities throughout the Russian Federation have been under growing pressure as local officials and government authorities continue to harass and limit the abilities of these groups to practice their faith freely.

As we learned at a recent Helsinki Commission hearing, instances of violence have become alarmingly common. Arson attacks against churches in Russia have occurred in several towns and cities with little or no police response.

In its 2005 International Religious Freedom Report, the State Department Office on International Religious Freedom notes: "Some Federal agencies and many local authorities continue to restrict the rights of various religious minorities. Moreover, contradictions between Federal and local laws and varying interpretations of the law provide regional officials with opportunities to restrict the activities of religious minorities. Many observers attribute discriminatory practices at the local level to the greater susceptibility of local governments than the Federal Government to discriminatory attitudes in lobbying by local majority religious groups. The government only occasionally intervenes to prevent or reverse discrimination at the local level."

Mr. Speaker, the internationally recognized expert on religious liberty in Russia, Larry Uzzell, has written: "Russia has now come to use as standard practice methods of religious repression that were applied only occasionally in the 1990s. Secular bureaucrats now typically refuse to authorize land transfers to Baptist churches and also forbid movie theaters or other public halls to sign rental contracts with them." As a result, as an example: "In Moscow City alone some 10 Baptist congregations have ceased to exist simply because they could not find places within which to worship."

I would just note parenthetically, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Larry for his extraordinary work in bringing this matter to the attention of the Congress. Larry is a tireless advocate for oppressed believers throughout Russia

and Central Asia. He is facing some serious health issues now, and I would like to wish him a very speedy recovery.

Mr. Speaker, in response to this growing and very negative trend in Russia, this resolution urges the Russian Federation to “ensure full protections of freedoms for all religious communities without distinction, whether registered or unregistered, and to end the harassment of unregistered religious groups by the security apparatus and other government agencies, as well as to ensure that law enforcement officials rigorously investigate acts of violence against unregistered religious communities, and to make certain that authorities are not complicit in such attacks.”

I point out that in March 2004 a district court banned the religious activity of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Moscow. For 2 years now the authorities have used the Moscow decision to harass the Jehovah’s Witnesses Administration Center in St. Petersburg, with threats to “liquidate” the administrative center which could threaten local congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses throughout all of Russia.

Members of the Russia’s Muslim community and respected human rights activists have expressed concern regarding what they contend are large-scale fabrications of terrorism against Russian Muslims. One of Russia’s Supreme Muftis has stated that random police checks and arrests are becoming commonplace throughout Russia for Russian Muslims.

Let me reiterate that Russia has every right to defend itself against terrorism and to investigate and prosecute terrorists. Of course it does. Here in the United States we face the problem of combating terrorism while safeguarding civil liberties. I would urge the government, however, to strive for the proper balance in defending both its citizens as well as their civil liberties.

Mr. Speaker, the religious liberty picture in Russia is not entirely dark, and it would be disingenuous to make that assertion.

□ 1530

There are Nations that have worse records. They can be found on the list of “countries of particular concern” that is issued by the U.S. Department of State in its annual report on religious freedom around the world, so-called CPC countries like Vietnam.

However, Russia is a member of the U.N. Security Council, an OSCE-participating State, and will soon chair the Council of Europe. In addition, this year, it is the chair of the G-8 and the host of the G-8 Summit in St. Petersburg in July. Considering all of these positions, they should be expected to uphold basic, internationally recognized and accepted standards to protect peaceful religious practice.

That is what this resolution is all about.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of our time.

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I might consume, and I rise in strong support of this legislation.

First of all, I want to commend my good friend from New Jersey for introducing yet another important resolution concerning religious freedom in Russia. CHRIS SMITH has been a leader on this issue for many years, and I want to pay public tribute to his commitment. His tireless leadership in support of both religious freedom and all human rights are legendary in this body.

Mr. Speaker, the fall of Soviet communism was a watershed event of the 20th century. What emerged was, by no means, a Jeffersonian democracy. Only a fool would have expected that outcome, but for the first time in over seven decades, the citizens of the former Soviet Union truly expressed their views, practiced their religions, opened private businesses and traveled outside what we used to call the Iron Curtain.

But Mr. Speaker, I am profoundly troubled that the limited and growing democracy which emerged from the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the ensuing respect for human rights and religious freedom are quickly vanishing. Under the rule of Vladimir Putin and his small junta of former KGB officers, the achievements of the past decade are being reversed, with very little criticism from the international community.

This is a very sad development for the entire civilized world, for the United States, but most particularly for the people of Russia. And while we are nowhere near omnipotent in our relations with Russia, we must do whatever we can to counteract this very troubling trend.

As this resolution correctly notes, one of the casualties of rising authoritarianism in Russia under Putin has been the increased harassment of religious organizations that are not registered with the Russian Government, as well as stepped-up violence aimed at their membership. While some of these religious organizations refuse to register with the Russian State on principle, others have sought to register, only to be turned down repeatedly by the Russian Government.

Mr. Speaker, the Russian constitution commits the government to protect the right of Russian citizens to exercise their religious beliefs freely. It is most unfortunate that Mr. Putin and his cronies have failed to use the power of the Russian State to put an end to the mistreatment of unregistered churches and to stop acts of violence against average Russian citizens who simply wish to express their religious beliefs freely.

With passage of this resolution submitted by my friend, Mr. SMITH, Congress will demand that the Russian

Federation reverse the troubling trend away from freedom and democracy under Vladimir Putin and urges our administration and our European friends to ensure that religious freedom remains firmly on the radar screen in our dealings with the Russians.

Mr. Speaker, this summer, a Group of Eight industrialized democracies, so-called, will meet in St. Petersburg for their annual summit. Given the dramatic erosion of religious and political freedom in Russia, it is imperative that the original G-7 nations clearly and unequivocally inform Russia that its membership in the G-8 will be suspended unless Mr. Putin is willing to change the negative direction in which he is taking the Russian nation.

Russia was originally invited to join the G-7 as merely a guest, at a time when Russia, under Yeltsin, was moving in a positive direction. Now that churches are being closed, political opponents are being locked away in Siberia and the media no longer is free, the parliament is no longer independent, the courts are an adjunct of the Kremlin, we can no longer pretend that Russia belongs in the G-8.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly support the legislation submitted by Mr. SMITH. I urge all of my colleagues to do so.

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

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of the time to, first of all, thank my good friend and colleague, Mr. LANTOS, for his eloquent statement and for his leadership for decades on the fundamental issue of human rights, particularly as it relates to religious freedom. We have been partners, along with FRANK WOLF and a few other Members of this body for years in pressuring Moscow and what was formerly the Warsaw Pact nations to liberalize their policies.

As Mr. LANTOS pointed out so well a moment ago, there is a very troubling and dangerous trend as Putin takes Russia in the wrong direction, especially as it relates to NGOs, religious freedom and religious bodies of all kinds and various denominations, and just basic civil liberties are being constricted in that country, Russia needs the oxygen of liberty and freedom in order to realize it’s vast potential.

So I want to thank again Mr. LANTOS for his wonderful statement and leadership.

I would also like to thank John Finerty from the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, who is our Russian expert. John has been on the commission since 1981. When I got elected 26 years ago, John Finerty was there, a Russian speaker, a Russian expert, who has provided valuable insight to both Democrats and Republicans on the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe. His wisdom, his council, his clarity has aided us while we travelled to Russia, when we met with lawmakers in bilateral discussions, with members of the Duma and

other officials from Russia, and has always provided us the insight that we needed, and like I said, that sense of perspective and timeliness as well as what our next steps ought to be. John has been to Russia and to the Soviet Union at least 27 times over the years.

I will never forget when he accompanied FRANK WOLF and I, when we went to Moscow on a very I think historic trip where we visited Perm Camp 35 where Nathan Sharansky had spent so many years of his life, John was with us on an historic trip/meeting with the Duma. Four days of talks—and did we ever need John's incredible knowledge and insight. He was amazing! So I want to thank John for his leadership for all of these years and helping us with this legislation today.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. WALDEN of Oregon). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New Jersey?

There was no objection.

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. Speaker, I rise as a sponsor and in support of H. Con. Res. 190, which urges the Russian Federation to "ensure full protection of freedoms for all religious communities without distinction, whether registered and unregistered, and end the harassment of unregistered religious groups by the security apparatus and other government agencies," as well as to "ensure that law enforcement officials vigorously investigate acts of violence against unregistered religious communities, as well as make certain that authorities are not complicit in such attacks."

As the Ranking House Member on the Helsinki Commission, I have seen how religious freedoms for minority religious communities throughout the Russian Federation have come under increasing pressure. Throughout that vast country, local officials and government authorities continue to harass and limit the ability of these groups to practice their faith freely. In addition, instances of violence, such as arson attacks, have been alarmingly common in recent years. The Helsinki Commission heard disturbing testimony to this effect in April of last year.

The State Department's International Religious Freedom Report for 2005 reported that some federal agencies and many local authorities continued to restrict the rights of various religious minorities, and the internationally recognized expert on religious liberty in Russia, Larry Uzzell, has written that even in Moscow some 10 Baptist congregations have ceased to exist because local bureaucrats refused to allow rentals or property transfers for the use of worship services.

Mr. Speaker, I am concerned that the religious liberty picture in Russia is deteriorating at a critical time for Russia. Russia is an OSCE participating state and assumes the leadership of the Council of Europe in May of this year. Russia also chairs the G-8 this year. A nation holding such positions should not be a country where members of minority religious groups need to constantly battle with bureaucrats in order to have a place to wor-

ship, or to get permission from the local clergy of another faith in order to hold a public gathering, or to wonder if their prayer house will be the target of vandalism.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H. Con. Res. 190, and I again thank my Helsinki Commission Chairman, CHRIS SMITH, for introducing this resolution, and for his tireless efforts on behalf of religious freedom and liberty around the world. I also join Chairman SMITH in commending John Finerty of the Helsinki Commission staff for his decades of service to the Commission, and I especially thank him for assisting me in my interactions with members of the Russian Duma through our OSCE Parliamentary Assembly process.

Mr. PITTS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H. Con. Res. 190, urging the Russian Federation to protect and ensure religious freedom for all people in Russia.

Last year witnesses at a Helsinki Commission hearing on unregistered religious groups in Russia, provided alarming reports about the actions of local authorities towards unregistered or minority religious communities. Recurring reports of police harassment and criminal violence (that is rarely vigorously investigated) against these groups is jeopardizing the status of religious liberties in Russia.

Adding to the concerns are recent reports that the Duma is preparing legislation to regulate the activities of missionaries. Reportedly, the bill would create administrative and criminal penalties for "unlawful missionary work connected with provoking religious extremism." There was also speculation in the Russian media that the Justice Ministry was looking to tighten the rules for granting visas to foreign missionaries. Furthermore, there are also reports that the Duma is considering an amendment to existing legislation that would require re-registration of registered religious organizations.

Mr. Speaker, these initiatives make evident that some people in the Russian government believe the role of the state is to control religious freedom rather than to facilitate and protect free expression. Officials know that it is very difficult for unregistered religious organizations to function effectively and freely—they know that limiting the actions of missionaries and restricting the distribution of visas would be the best option to control the growth of religious organizations.

The Congress must send a clear signal to President Putin and other Russian officials that religious freedom is a critically important issue and that we expect Russia to uphold its own constitution and its international commitments and protect the fundamental right of freedom of conscience. This resolution specifically urges Russia to fully protect religious freedoms for all religious communities, whether registered or unregistered, and to prevent the harassment of unregistered religious groups by the security apparatus and other government agencies. I strongly urge my colleagues to support H. Con. Res. 190.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution, H. Con. Res. 190.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds of those present have voted in the affirmative.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

PERMITTING USE OF ROTUNDA FOR HOLOCAUST DAYS OF REMEMBRANCE CEREMONY

Mr. EHLERS. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 350) permitting the use of the rotunda of the Capitol for a ceremony as part of the commemoration of the days of remembrance of victims of the Holocaust.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. CON. RES. 350

*Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring),*

SECTION 1. USE OF ROTUNDA FOR HOLOCAUST DAYS OF REMEMBRANCE CEREMONY.

The rotunda of the Capitol is authorized to be used on April 27, 2006, for a ceremony as part of the commemoration of the days of remembrance of victims of the Holocaust. Physical preparations for the ceremony shall be carried out in accordance with such conditions as the Architect of the Capitol may prescribe.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. EHLERS) and the gentleman from California (Ms. MILLENDER-MCDONALD) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Michigan.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. EHLERS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the subject of this bill.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Michigan?

There was no objection.

Mr. EHLERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

One of the stated purposes of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is to provide for appropriate ways for the Nation to commemorate the days of remembrance as an annual, national, civic commemoration of the Holocaust and encourage and sponsor appropriate observances of such days of remembrance throughout the United States.

The first Days of Remembrance ceremony in the rotunda of the United States Capitol occurred in 1979, and the rotunda ceremony has since become the inspiration for similar Holocaust remembrance ceremonies that take place throughout the United States.