

legislation. First, when GM made its decision regarding the Massena Powertrain plant, the company failed to notify me or any elected officials in advance. However, under the Rural America Job Assistance and Creation Act, companies that employ 100 or more workers would have to provide the impacted elected officials with 60 days' advance notice of a decision to reduce its workforce or close. This notice would serve two purposes: (1) to alert these officials to the situation and the impact it will have on workers and the community; and (2) to provide these officials with the opportunity to assist in determining if State and/or Federal resources are available and can be utilized to prevent closure or layoffs and the resulting loss of employment opportunities.

Secondly, the GM situation in Massena also highlights the need for a provision in the Rural America Job Assistance and Creation Act that would exclude from gross income up to \$25,000 of any qualified severance pay. Needless to say, it is often very difficult for employees who suffer layoffs or the shutdown of their place of employment, particularly in rural areas, to find new employment that provides a comparable income. While severance pay certainly provides affected individuals with a small sense of security and is without a doubt a helping hand in a time of great need, unfortunately, the recipients often lose a third of their severance pay to taxes because they are pushed into a higher bracket.

Madam Speaker, this bill is also designed to help my district and the rest of rural America develop jobs, in the wake of plant closings and otherwise. For example, the Rural America Job Assistance and Creation Act would establish regional skills alliances to help identify needed skills and create and implement effective training solutions. In addition, the bill would also encourage cooperation between educational institutions and entrepreneurs who have innovative ideas but cannot afford the legal and consultant fees necessary to take their ideas from the drawing board to the production line or otherwise make them a reality.

To increase international cooperation in the development of economic and job opportunities, the Rural America Job Assistance and Creation Act would also streamline the immigration visa procedures for H1-B professional specialty workers by requiring the submission of the H1-B labor condition application to the U.S. Department of Labor at the same time as the classification petition is submitted to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. By reducing unnecessary delays in the processing of these visas, this provision would help facilitate the employment-related travel necessary for border areas like my northern New York congressional district to further its symbiotic relationship with Canada and thereby create good jobs.

Finally, the Rural America Job Assistance and Creation Act would expand the work opportunity tax credit to include both small businesses and individuals found in communities experiencing population loss and low job growth rates such as those in central and northern New York. Approximately 100 such communities would be so designated, subsidizing some 8,000 jobs in each area.

Accordingly, I ask my colleagues to join with me to enact this important legislation. It not only would help my Massena constituents as

they face the fallout of GM's decision, it also would enhance the economic opportunities available and quality of life throughout our great Nation.

CALLING FOR THE IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF DR. HALEH ESFANDIARI

HON. CHRIS VAN HOLLEN

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 22, 2007

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Madam Speaker, in December 2006, while visiting her ailing 93-year-old mother in Iran, Dr. Haleh Esfandiari, a respected American scholar, and director of the Middle East Program at the Smithsonian's Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, DC, was imprisoned by the Government of Iran.

Dr. Esfandiari is a dual U.S.-Iranian citizen who has lived in the United States for more than 25 years. She taught Persian language and literature for many years at Princeton University where she inspired untold numbers of students to study the rich Persian language and culture.

While preparing to board her flight back to the United States, Dr. Esfandiari was stopped by Iranian officials, and forced at knife point to turn over her passport. Afterwards, she was repeatedly interrogated by Iranian intelligence officials and, though the Ministry of Intelligence has yet to produce any evidence of wrongdoing, she has been held in Iran's notorious Evin Prison since May 7, 2007.

Iran's imprisonment of Haleh Esfandiari shows a gross disregard for the rule of law and belies statements by Iranian government officials that Iran would like to improve relations with the United States.

I ask my congressional colleagues to join me in passing this resolution to demand that the government of Iran immediately release Dr. Haleh Esfandiari and to encourage the U.S. Government to employ all appropriate means to expedite the process.

TRIBUTE TO WHITE CHURCH CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF KANSAS CITY, KANSAS

HON. DENNIS MOORE

OF KANSAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 22, 2007

Mr. MOORE of Kansas. Madam Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the White Church Christian Church of Kansas City, Kansas, which will celebrate the 175th anniversary of its founding on June 2, 2007.

White Church Christian Church is the oldest continuously operating church in the State of Kansas; the church and the Delaware Indian Cemetery west of the church are listed on the Register of Historic Kansas Places. The inside walls of the original log building were white-washed, so the native Indians referred to it as the "white church." As a result, the surrounding area became known as White Church, Kansas.

In 1830, the Missouri Conference of the Methodist Church met in St. Louis to establish the mission society that would soon begin its work among the Kansas Indians. The Rev. Thomas Johnson was appointed to serve as superintendent of what was then known as the Kansas Indiana Missionary District. Two years later, Rev. Thomas Johnson, his brother Rev. William Johnson, and Rev. Thomas Markham established a mission school and church at the site of today's church. In the 1834 annual report of the Missionary Society, it was reported: "The church has forty members, some serving as exhorters, and they were regular in attendance at preaching and other means of grace. There are twenty-four native children in the mission school who are learning well." In 1844, the original church was destroyed by fire and a new church was built. Beginning in 1850, the land in the reservation was deeded by the government to Indians individually. Some sold their ground and soon the area began to be settled by white people.

In 1870, a school district was established and a school located near the church adopted the same name, White Church School. Disaster struck the church for a second time on May 11, 1886, when the walnut-framed White Church and the original White Church School building were destroyed by a tornado. In the following year, a two-story school building was erected on the present site of the White Church Elementary School. On May 4, 1904, the cornerstone of the present native stone church structure was laid. The Gothic building included 21 memorial stained glass windows.

The adjoining Delaware Indian Cemetery is the oldest area cemetery in which burials are still conducted, with the earliest recorded burial having taken place in 1881. For approximately 100 years, White Church, under the direction of the Methodist Church, served both Native Americans and White Americans. In 1931, the White Church withdrew its affiliation from the Methodist Church and organized a Community Church at White Church. Later, in 1956, the congregation voted to become affiliated with the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ and was renamed White Church Community Christian Church. In 1968, the word "Community" was removed from the church name. In 1965, an educational unit was built on top of the stone foundation at the south end of Fellowship Hall, and in 1966, the church board established a pre-school and child care center to serve the community. Expansion of the congregation and improvements to the property have continued to the present day, as we approach the 175th anniversary of this anchor of the Kansas City community. As a history of the church, published in 1996, notes, "It is the prayer of the present generation of God's servants, that there always be a Church at this place, and that the generations which follow will continue to serve the Lord to the End of Time."

Madam Speaker, I know that you and all members of the House of Representatives join with me in commending the White Church Christian Church on its upcoming 175th anniversary celebration and I thank you for the opportunity to place this statement of commendation in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.