

mere numbers. Rather, they are sobering realities for millions of people of faith around the globe. Consider the following headlines from recent weeks alone: “Chinese Christians Face Tense Easter in Beijing,” “Egyptian Copts, Reeling From Violence, Want Protection,” “Baha’i Citizens Are Forced to Leave Iran,” “Pakistan’s Other Blemish: Anti-Religious Violence,” “Indonesia Pressured Over Ahmadiyah Muslim Sect Killings,” and “Thousands of Cameras Watch China’s Uighurs, Inhibiting Discourse.”

The bill I introduce today will make a number of strategic improvements to the Religious Freedom Office at the State Department. To start, it places the ambassador-at-large in the office of the Secretary of State as opposed to burying it within the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. This change is more in keeping with the original intent of the legislation that Congress passed. Over successive administrations this critical position has not been treated with the seniority it deserves and this revised language will help rectify this problem.

The legislation also provides the ambassador with oversight and management authority of the IRF Office and other religiously oriented positions and programs at the State Department and carves out funding in the larger Human Rights and Democracy Fund to enable the IRF office to promote religious freedom through advocacy, reporting and programming. The legislation requires the Secretary of State, in coordination with the Department of Defense, Homeland Security, the Treasury and the U.S. Agency for International Development to issue a one-time report to Congress on the best uses of foreign assistance to promote religious freedom and religious engagement.

In addition the legislation requires religious freedom training for every Foreign Service Officer (FSO) and states that USCIRF must be involved in that training. American embassies abroad must be islands of freedom. Whether in Vietnam, China, Pakistan or Iraq—every FSO should be trained and committed to advocating for those whose voices have been silenced by their own governments. This mandatory training will help ensure that our diplomatic corps is equipped in this regard.

My legislation also strengthens the “Countries of Particular Concern” (CPC) designation process and effectiveness. CPCs are countries whose governments are found to have engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The amended language will require that CPC designations are made 90 days after the issuance of the State Department’s annual religious freedom report. One hundred and twenty days after a country has been designated a CPC, the Secretary of State must submit a report to Congress that identifies the action taken, the purpose of the action, and an evaluation of its effectiveness and impact. Also included is language tightening the President’s waiver authority, so that indefinite waivers are not an option.

Very significantly, this legislation will reauthorize the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom until September 30, 2018. USCIRF, unlike the State Department, is unencumbered by the impulse to maintain good bilateral relations above all else—an impulse which sadly can result in critical issues of religious freedom being sidelined in the pursuit of broader foreign policy goals.

USCIRF, as an independent, bipartisan Federal Government commission, has been a reliable voice for the world’s persecuted people. It monitors and reports on religious freedom abroad and makes informed policy recommendations to Members of Congress, the President and the State Department, based in part on information gathered during extensive travel and meetings with senior foreign officials.

USCIRF regularly holds briefings and hearings for interested parties on and off the Hill and is frequently called upon to provide expert witness testimony to Congress.

Just in the last year the Commission has taken a leadership role on a series of key issues. It was quick to recognize the strategic importance and courageous voice of the late Shahbaz Bhatti, Pakistan’s federal minister of Minorities Affairs, an outspoken critic of his nation’s draconian blasphemy laws. During a critical time for the people of Sudan, it also issued special recommendations on the implementation of the historic Comprehensive Peace Agreement. It has made a series of policy recommendations aimed at preserving and protecting Iraq’s besieged religious minorities. It also has actively worked with dozens of Hill offices on combating the “defamation of religions” resolution before the United Nations.

In short, ensuring that the commission is reauthorized is of paramount importance. In a Constitution Day speech, President Ronald Reagan famously described our founding documents which enshrine basic liberties, among them religious freedom, as a “covenant we have made not only with ourselves, but with all of mankind.” Passage of this legislation will go a long way in helping us keep that covenant. I urge my colleagues’ support.

A TRIBUTE TO THE IOWA ENERGY

HON. TOM LATHAM

OF IOWA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 11, 2011

Mr. LATHAM. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate and recognize the Iowa Energy, the 2011 Champions of the National Basketball Association’s Developmental League and pride of Iowa.

The Energy captured the crown on Friday, April 29th, before an enthusiastic home crowd at the Wells Fargo Arena, where they defeated the defending NBA D-League champions the Rio Grande Valley Vipers by a score of 119–111.

This is the first league championship for the Iowa Energy, which is affiliated with the Chicago Bulls and the Phoenix Suns. The team’s establishment took place in 2007, inspired by the vision of Jerry Crawford, Gary Kirke, Sheldon Ohringer and Paul Drey to bring quality basketball to the heart of the heartland. The franchise has continually grown in stature and success, culminating this year with not only the team’s first championship of many to come but also the D-League’s MVP, Iowa State University Alumni Curtis Stinson. The Energy can also boast that the two largest crowds in the entire NBA D-League’s history are solely the product of this franchise and the incredible

basketball sporting event just concluded in Des Moines.

There can only be one champion at the end of any sport’s season, and I am honored to represent the great state where the Iowa Energy play and win. This feat marks years of unwavering commitment by the players, management and fans of the team and represents the best of Iowa’s people and their well known work ethic.

Mr. Speaker, all Iowans should take heart in MVP Curtis Stinson’s proclamation after the championship game: “We’re certified; we’re champions. They can’t ever take this away from us.” I know that all members of this body join me in congratulating the Iowa Energy and the tradition of basketball excellence that I expect to continue well into the future.

TRIBUTE TO RIDGECREST ARMED FORCES DAY 2011

HON. KEVIN MCCARTHY

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 11, 2011

Mr. MCCARTHY of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the efforts by many in the community of Ridgecrest to honor our service men and women on Armed Forces Day 2011.

The City of Ridgecrest is home to the Naval Air Weapons Station (NAWS) China Lake. NAWS China Lake was established during World War II for the purpose of weapons testing. Since then, NAWS China Lake has become the premier weapons development laboratory for the United States Navy. Many of my constituents living in Ridgecrest work at NAWS China Lake and take great pride in the support they provide to our Nation and they are properly recognized for their efforts on this day.

The 2011 Armed Forces Day is especially significant to the community of Ridgecrest because this year marks two significant anniversaries for NAWS China Lake and the United States. This year marks the centennial anniversary of Naval Aviation. In this anniversary, the Navy will be commemorating 100 years of Naval Aviation and honoring a century of mission-ready men and women and their many aviation achievements. Additionally, this year is significant for veterans of World War II because it will mark the 70th anniversary of our Nation’s entry into that war.

There have been many significant achievements by the scientists and engineers at China Lake. For example, they developed the air-intercept missile 9 Sidewinder in 1950. This has become the world’s most used air-to-air missile technology. Additionally, other rockets and missiles developed or tested at China Lake include the Mighty Mouse, Zuni, Shrike, Joint Stand-off Weapon and Joint Direct-Attack Munition.

Considering these two significant anniversaries and their importance to the City of Ridgecrest it gives me great pleasure to recognize the Ridgecrest community and their efforts there to pay tribute to the dedicated men and women who devote their lives to military service.