

Let me be clear: I do not believe that offshore drilling can ever be made safe enough to put the beaches and tourist economy of New Jersey at risk. There will always be the chance of equipment failure or human error that produces a catastrophic result, regardless of the level of technology employed. No amount of oil or gas is worth the potential destruction of the state's lifeblood. I also believe that a continued dependence on offshore oil and gas, from any part of the country, keeps us from addressing the real issue that we should be focusing on: how to move to a renewable energy economy and ensure long-lasting energy and climate security.

However, I acknowledge that we cannot get there overnight, and offshore drilling will continue in places like the Gulf of Mexico, at least for the time being. But while it is happening, we should ensure that it is being done with the absolute best safety and environmentally responsible technology available, and I urge my colleagues to join me in getting to that point by supporting the Offshore Drilling Safety Technology Improvement Act of 2013.

HONORING THOMAS E.
SCHWEDHELM

HON. MIKE THOMPSON

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, December 16, 2013

Mr. THOMPSON of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and honor the Chief of Police for the City of Santa Rosa, California, Tom Schwedhelm, who is retiring after a 26-year career in law enforcement.

Chief Schwedhelm worked as a cadet and then a correctional officer in the Sonoma County Jail prior to graduating from the Santa Rosa Training Center's Police Academy in 1983.

In 1996, Tom Schwedhelm was promoted to Sergeant working with Sex Crimes & Family Violence investigations. He also had several collateral assignments: Special Response Unit Team Member and Team Leader; an Instructor in Use of Force, Chemical Agents, and Crowd Control; and an Ethics Facilitator.

In 2002 he was promoted to Lieutenant and was promoted to Captain in 2004 as the Captain in charge of both the Field Services Division and the Special Services Division. In March 2009, he was appointed as the Acting Chief of Police; he was subsequently appointed as the official Chief of Police for the City of Santa Rosa on May 3, 2009.

Chief Schwedhelm was instrumental in developing one of the first Victim Services Programs, and assisted in the implementation of CHOICES Grant Program, a community-wide effort to address gang violence in the community, as well as the Family Justice Center, the Mayor's Gang Prevention Task Force and the Police Department Succession Planning.

Chief Schwedhelm is a second generation law enforcement officer. He and his wife, Jackie, have lived in Santa Rosa for 22 years, where they have raised their two children.

Mr. Speaker, Chief Schwedhelm has served the City of Santa Rosa well during his distinguished career. It is therefore appropriate that we commend him for his many years of public service and wish him well on his retirement.

HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN EGYPT

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, December 16, 2013

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, a hearing that I convened last week examined the escalating human rights abuses in Egypt. It was fitting that we held the hearing on December 10, International Human Rights Day, because we are witnessing grievous violence and other abuses directed against religious and political minorities, particularly the Copts and other Christians, about which our government and the media has said far too little—which seems to be a pattern worldwide.

The persecution of Christians is escalating. Witness the slaughter of Christians in the Central African Republic (CAR). Bishop Nongo of the CAR told my committee that Christians were being targeted because of their faith while the U.N., the United States, and the rest of the world looked on. Last Thursday, I chaired a hearing on American pastor Saeed Abedini who is jailed and suffering torture in Iran. Pastor Abedini's wife, Naghmeh, told my committee: "While I am thankful for President Obama's willingness to express concern about my husband and the other imprisoned Americans in Iran during his recent phone conversation with Iran's new president, Hassan Rouhani, I was devastated to learn that the administration didn't even ask for my husband's release when directly seated across the table from the leaders of the government that holds him captive. My husband is suffering because he is a Christian. He is suffering because he is an American. Yet, his own government, at least the Executive and diplomatic representatives, has abandoned him. Don't we owe it to him as a nation to stand up for his human rights, for his freedom?"

After President Mubarak resigned in February of 2011, the world hoped for a new Egypt, a just government for all Egyptians, which would not make President Mubarak's mistakes—but reality has been just the opposite.

Horrible anti-Christian pogroms have taken place under each of the post-Mubarak governments. For some of these abuses, the governments bear the responsibility of inaction. For others they bear direct responsibility. In recent months, undercurrents of abuse and contempt for human dignity long existing in Egypt have turned into flash floods of violence.

For example, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces presided over the Maspero protest massacre in October 2011. At least 25 people were killed and more than 300 injured—almost all of them Copts—when the military drove trucks through the crowd and used live ammunition against the unarmed protestors.

Under the now-displaced Morsi government three low-level soldiers involved were charged with minor crimes and received two- to three-year sentences. No commanding officers were held responsible for ordering or failing to prevent the deadly assaults.

While Mr. Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party, at times voiced support for an Egypt that was home to Muslims and Christians, his inaction belied his rhetoric. In April of 2012, St. Mark's Cathedral,

seat of the Coptic Pope, was attacked by 30–40 Muslim youths. While dozens of Copts were sheltering inside, security forces joined the mob. Rather than dispersing the crowd, they participated in the all-night attack or stood idly by as rocks, gasoline bombs, and gas canisters were lobbed into the iconic cathedral. Despite this, President Morsi denied that the clash was sectarian in nature.

After Mr. Morsi was removed in July of this year, the military ended the Muslim Brotherhood's sit-in with violence, killing hundreds of protestors. Tragically, some in the Muslim Brotherhood scapegoated the Copts although the Copts had nothing to do with the military's violent response.

On August 14, a day that will be remembered as the worst day for Copts in 700 years, thirty-seven churches, five schools, three Bible societies, four other Christian institutions, and many homes and businesses were burned or damaged by mobs. More than 100 deaths were documented in the initial spate of violence and its aftermath.

Some Copts have charged the current military government in Egypt with allowing the attacks on Coptic persons, businesses, churches, and homes to continue—often in sight of police stations and in spite of repeated and direct calls for help—in order to solidify government power as the only alternative to the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as to justify their own heavy-handed crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Muslim Brotherhood denies any involvement in the attacks occurring across the country, and has at times condemned them.

Yet the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party Branch in Helwan reportedly posted a statement holding the Coptic Pope responsible for Morsi's removal and otherwise linked Copts to attacks on the Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood also called for Friday prayers to be held in an evangelical church in Minya after it was occupied and converted into a mosque on August 15.

Whoever the attackers are—and that is one thing we hope to learn more about today—the bottom line is that Coptic citizens are having their most basic human rights—freedom of religion, freedom of association, and equal protection of the laws—denied.

We can never rest while human dignity is so grossly trampled on—nor can we ever accept the suffering that has marked Coptic life for decades, very much including the abductions, forced conversions, and forced marriage of Coptic girls and women. These abuses have continued unabated, and, by some reports, have escalated sharply following the Arab Spring, as has the abuse of the Egyptian courts to prosecute blasphemy cases against Christians, moderate Muslims and secularists.

Moreover, despite the nearly 1.5 billion dollars in foreign aid American taxpayers give Egypt each year, neither the Mubarak government nor the Morsi government, or now the military government, has seen fit to return kidnapped American citizen children Noor and Ramsey Bower, who were abducted by their mother to Egypt in 2009 in violation of valid U.S. court orders, to the United States. They, along with about 30 other American children in Egypt, are forced to live without the love and guidance of an American parent who daily fights for their return, while being stripped of half of their culture and half of their identity.