

HAPPY 350TH BIRTHDAY TO
SCHENECTADY, NY

(Mr. TONKO asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. TONKO. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate and celebrate the city of Schenectady on the occasion of its 350th birthday.

Originally inhabited by the Mohawk tribe and then the Dutch, Schenectady's rich history has often served as an inspiration and genesis for many of America's accomplishments.

In the late 1800s, Thomas Edison moved Edison Machine Works to Schenectady, where advances led to new products, including the manufactured light bulb. Later becoming the headquarters of General Electric, Schenectady also played host to the former home of ALCO, the American Locomotive Company. These two developments prompted the community to be dubbed "the city that lights and hauls the world" and the "electric city."

Today, Schenectady is an important part of New York's Tech Valley, a nationwide leading region committed to green technology. From steam turbines to advanced batteries, Schenectady continues to lead the country with a focus on ingenuity and innovation, proving we can "Make it in America."

I am pleased to applaud the city of Schenectady on the rich history and numerous achievements it has accrued as we celebrate the wonderful 350th birthday of this community. I look forward to many bright and booming days to come.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER
PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair will postpone further proceedings today on the motion to suspend the rules on which a recorded vote or the yeas and nays are ordered, or on which the vote incurs objection under clause 6 of rule XX.

Any record vote on the postponed question will be taken later.

ESTABLISHING SPECIAL ENVOY
FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN
THE NEAR EAST AND SOUTH
CENTRAL ASIA

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 440) to provide for the establishment of the Special Envoy to Promote Religious Freedom of Religious Minorities in the Near East and South Central Asia, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 440

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. FINDINGS.

Congress finds the following:

(1) Seven Baha'i leaders in Iran have been wrongfully imprisoned since 2008.

(2) In May 2010, suspected terrorists attacked two mosques in Pakistan belonging to the Ahmaddiya minority Muslim sect, killing at least 80 people. Ahmadis consider themselves Muslim, but Pakistani law does not recognize them as such.

(3) Said Musa, an Afghan Christian convert, was arrested in May 2010 on charges of apostasy, a crime which can carry the death sentence, and was released in February 2011 only after sustained international pressure.

(4) On October 31, 2010, gunmen laid siege on Our Lady of Salvation Church in Baghdad, Iraq killing at least 52 police and worshippers, including two priests, making it the worst massacre of Iraqi Christians since 2003.

(5) Iraq's ancient and once vibrant Christian population that numbered an estimated 1,500,000 out of a total population in Iraq of 30,000,000 in 2003 has been reduced by at least one half, due in significant part to Christians fleeing the violence.

(6) In November 2010, a Pakistani court sentenced Aasia Bibi, a Christian mother of five, to death under the country's blasphemy law for insulting the Prophet Muhammad.

(7) On New Year's Eve 2010, 23 people were killed when a suicide bomber attacked a Coptic Christian church in Alexandria, Egypt.

(8) On March 2, 2011, Pakistani Federal Minorities Minister Shahbaz Bhatti, the only Christian member of the Cabinet, who was outspoken in his opposition to Pakistan's blasphemy laws was assassinated by extremists.

(9) The Department of State's 2010 International Religious Freedom Report stated that many religious minority groups in Uzbekistan "faced heavy fines and/or short jail terms for violations of restrictive religion laws".

(10) The Special Envoy for Anti-Semitism, Hannah Rosenthal, has noted that Holocaust glorification "is especially virulent in the Middle East media".

(11) A number of countries in the Middle East have recently undergone popular revolutions which in some countries have left security vacuums making religious minorities especially vulnerable to violent attacks, such as—

(A) in March 2011, the Shahedin Church in Helwan province, Egypt, was torched, leading to protests which spurred sectarian clashes in the streets of Cairo;

(B) on March 20, 2011, a group of Salafists in Upper Egypt cut off a Christian man's ear and burned his home and car; and

(C) news reports from April 2011 indicate that Salafi organizations in Egypt have been implicated in the destruction of Sufi shrines across the country fueling violent conflict.

(12) Many of these ancient faith communities are being forced to flee the lands which they have inhabited for centuries.

(13) The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom has recommended that Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan be designated by the Department of State as Countries of Particular Concern in accordance with the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998.

(14) The situation on the ground in the region continues to develop rapidly and the United States Government needs an individual who can respond in kind and focus on the critical situation of religious minorities in these countries.

SEC. 2. SPECIAL ENVOY TO PROMOTE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN THE NEAR EAST AND SOUTH CENTRAL ASIA.

(a) APPOINTMENT.—The President shall appoint a Special Envoy to Promote Religious Freedom of Religious Minorities in the Near East and South Central Asia (in this Act referred to as the "Special Envoy") within the Department of State.

(b) QUALIFICATIONS.—The Special Envoy should be a person of recognized distinction in the field of human rights and religious freedom and with expertise in the Near East and South Central Asia regions. The Special Envoy shall have the rank of ambassador and shall hold the office at the pleasure of the President.

(c) PROHIBITION.—The person appointed as Special Envoy may not hold any other position of Federal employment for the period of time during which the person holds the position of Special Envoy.

SEC. 3. DUTIES.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Special Envoy shall carry out the following duties:

(1) Promote the right of religious freedom of religious minorities in the countries of the Near East and the countries of South Central Asia, denounce the violation of such right, and recommend appropriate responses by the United States Government when such right is violated.

(2) Monitor and combat acts of religious intolerance and incitement targeted against religious minorities in the countries of the Near East and the countries of South Central Asia.

(3) Work to ensure that the unique needs of religious minority communities in the countries of the Near East and the countries of South Central Asia are addressed, including the economic and security needs of such communities to the extent that such needs are directly tied to religious-based discrimination and persecution.

(4) Work with foreign governments of the countries of the Near East and the countries of South Central Asia to address laws that are inherently discriminatory toward religious minority communities in such countries.

(5) Coordinate and assist in the preparation of that portion of the report required by sections 116(d) and 502B(b) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C. 2151n(d) and 2304(b)) relating to the nature and extent of religious freedom of religious minorities in the countries of the Near East and the countries of South Central Asia.

(6) Coordinate and assist in the preparation of that portion of the report required by section 102(b) of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6412(b)) relating to the nature and extent of religious freedom of religious minorities in the countries of the Near East and the countries of South Central Asia.

(b) COORDINATION.—In carrying out the duties under subsection (a), the Special Envoy shall, to the maximum extent practicable, coordinate with the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration of the Department of State, the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, and other relevant Federal agencies and officials.

SEC. 4. DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATION.

Subject to the direction of the President and the Secretary of State, the Special Envoy is authorized to represent the United States in matters and cases relevant to religious freedom in the countries of the Near East and the countries of South Central Asia in—

(1) contacts with foreign governments, intergovernmental organizations, and specialized agencies of the United Nations, the

Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe, and other international organizations of which the United States is a member; and

(2) multilateral conferences and meetings relevant to religious freedom in the countries of the Near East and the countries of South Central Asia.

SEC. 5. PRIORITY COUNTRIES AND CONSULTATION.

(a) **PRIORITY COUNTRIES.**—In carrying out this Act, the Special Envoy shall give priority to programs, projects, and activities for Egypt, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

(b) **CONSULTATION.**—The Special Envoy shall consult with domestic and international nongovernmental organizations and multilateral organizations and institutions, as the Special Envoy considers appropriate to fulfill the purposes of this Act.

SEC. 6. FUNDING.

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—Of the amounts made available for “Diplomatic and Consular Programs” for fiscal years 2011 through 2015, \$1,000,000 is authorized to be appropriated for each such fiscal year for the hiring of staff, for the conduct of investigations, and for necessary travel to carry out the provisions of this Act.

(b) **FUNDING OFFSET.**—To offset the costs to be incurred by the Department of State for the hiring of staff, for the conduct of investigations, and for necessary travel to carry out the provisions of this Act for fiscal years 2011 through 2015, the Secretary of State shall eliminate such positions within the Department of State, unless otherwise authorized or required by law, as the Secretary determines to be necessary to fully offset such costs.

(c) **LIMITATION.**—No additional funds are authorized to be appropriated for “Diplomatic and Consular Programs” to carry out this Act.

SEC. 7. SUNSET.

This Act shall cease to be effective beginning on October 1, 2015.

The **SPEAKER** pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. **SMITH**) and the gentleman from California (Mr. **BERMAN**) 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.

I rise to urge my colleagues to support H.R. 440, a bill to establish a Special Envoy to Promote Religious Freedom of Religious Minorities in the Near East and South Central Asia.

The bill is authored by my very good friend and colleague, Congressman **FRANK WOLF**, who was also the author of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 and other religious freedom legislation. He has taken the lead in Congress time and time again to advance the cause of those who are persecuted because of their faith. I wish to thank him for his years of service on this issue—his legislation and his tireless advocacy on behalf of religious freedom.

Mr. Speaker, this bill establishes the special envoy position for religious minorities in 31 Middle Eastern and South Central Asian countries, almost all of which have had bad or very bad records of persecuting or disadvantaging religious minorities. The special envoy

will represent the United States in contacts with foreign governments, intergovernmental organizations, U.N. agencies, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and in contacts with international organizations and multilateral conferences. He or she will also meet with victims and try to take their story to offending governments to try to end the abuse.

We know from experience, Mr. Speaker, that special envoys, including and especially for Sudan and Northern Ireland, have achieved unparalleled successes over the years in mitigating explosive situations and literally saving lives all while pursuing positive and durable solutions to what appear to be intractable and unresolvable problems.

But not all special envoys have been equally effective. Almost everything depends on whom the President appoints to the position. So I would appeal to the President: When this bill becomes law, appoint someone with the passion, energy, and experience to get this job done and to stand up as never before for these persecuted minorities.

Mr. Speaker, many of my colleagues will speak about different religious minorities in the Middle East, but I am particularly concerned about the Coptic minority in Egypt. They have been called the bellwether of the rights for religious minorities in the Middle East. As the largest and one of the oldest minorities, they are suffering, and their escalating agony portends suffering throughout the region.

And make no mistake, they are suffering. On Friday of last week, I chaired a hearing specifically to hear of the needs and experiences of the Copts during this time during transition. What I heard and what my colleagues heard on the Helsinki Commission worried us deeply. Coptic women and girls, some as young as 14, are being systematically lured from their families or kidnapped off the street corners and forced to change their religion and forced to marry outside of their community. These young girls frequently suffer physical and psychological abuse, including rape, beatings, forced isolation, and lack of personal freedom both before and after their so-called “marriage/conversion.” The drugging of victims appears to be commonplace.

One story that emerged at the hearing detailed the situation of a married woman who was forced to leave her Coptic community and marry a Muslim. Her family was present at the official inquiry—which are no longer conducted, I might point out—and said that she showed signs of being drugged. She was out of it. Over and over she repeated, “I had to do it for the children. I had to do it for the children.”

Dr. Michele Clark, an internationally recognized anti-trafficking expert—she was one of those who led the Protection Project at Johns Hopkins and was director of the OSCE trafficking efforts for years—she authored a report called

“The Disappearance, Forced Conversions, and Forced Marriages of Coptic Christian Women in Egypt.” She testified that this happens to thousands of Coptic women and girls each and every year. She said this on Friday. Others also concurred in that analysis.

Dr. Clark further testified that the mounting evidence shows that the term “alleged”—which has been used in the U.S. State Department Reports on Human Rights Practices, as well as in the TIP report—needs to be replaced. It’s no longer even close to being accurate. It’s not an allegation; it’s a fact that she herself, as a human rights investigator, has helped to establish by doing extensive investigation and inquiries on the ground in Egypt.

She pointed out that the criminality of alleged forced marriages and conversions is generally dismissed by authorities here and everywhere else, especially in Egypt. The coverup must end. Young women are presumed to be willing participants, they are not. The abduction and the disappearance of Coptic women and girls follow, as she puts it, consistent patterns and constitutes human trafficking—modern day slavery.

Dr. Clark testified that men and women and peers are used to build trust and dispel resistance in young women targeted for conversion in marriage. Most cases documented in the report begin with a trusting relationship that ultimately leads to the disappearance or abduction, marriage to a Muslim man, and conversion to Islam. These supposed new friends exploit the vulnerability and naivete of a young Coptic woman.

Once trust has been established, girls are lured to an isolated place, drugged and kidnapped. Often they are raped. Following the rape, the Coptic women experience shame and fear of how their families will respond. They become more willing to stay with the Muslim friends. They feel that they have been so abused. And then they often marry their rapist because they feel they have nowhere else to go. This outrageous abuse must be exposed and stopped—and these young women rescued.

□ 1240

Let me just point out to my colleagues, what is going on in Egypt and the abuses being experienced by Christians and people of the Baha’i faith in Iran and elsewhere, we need to do much more than we have done to combat this, to speak out, to do effective chronicling, but also, once you get the information, to ensure that it is actionable and that you take it to those governments. Sadly, we have not done that. A special envoy would be uniquely equipped and empowered to take the cause of the beleaguered, suffering religious minorities in the Middle East and to fight, and to fight every day of the week for those people.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. **BERMAN**. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this bill, and I yield

myself as much time as I may consume.

This bipartisan legislation creates a special envoy to promote religious freedom of religious minorities in the Near East and South Central Asia. Housed at the State Department, the special envoy would be responsible for monitoring and combating acts of religious intolerance, engaging with foreign governments to address laws that discriminate against religious minorities, and working to ensure that the unique needs of religious minority communities are being addressed.

This bill is important because religious minority communities all around the world, but particularly in the Near East and South Central Asia, are facing increased attacks and increased persecution. For example, Iraq used to have a significant number of religious minorities, including Christians, Yazidis, Sabean Mandaeans, Baha'is, Shabaks, Kaka'is, and a small number of Jews. These groups have been subject to escalating violence, persecution, and discrimination for their religious beliefs, and today they comprise only about 3 percent of Iraq's population. By some estimates, half of Iraq's Christian population has fled since 2003.

In November of 2010, a Pakistani court sentenced Aasia Bibi, a Christian and mother of five, to death under the country's blasphemy law. And what was her offense? In June 2009, she was asked to get water for herself and a group of women working in the fields with her. The other laborers objected to a non-Muslim touching the water bowl and an argument ensued. That group of women later falsely accused Aasia of speaking ill of the prophet Mohammed in order to settle a personal score against her. Aasia remains in prison awaiting review of her death sentence.

When Punjab's Governor Salman Taseer had the courage to demand that Aasia be pardoned, one of his own bodyguards killed him. Two months later, when Pakistan's Minister for Minorities, Shahbaz Bhatti, condemned the blasphemy law, militants executed him in broad daylight.

In Egypt, as the gentleman from New Jersey has stated, 23 men, women, and children were killed in a bombing at an Alexandria church in Egypt on New Year's Eve. Just last May, extremists attacked Christians at St. Mina Church in Cairo, leaving 12 dead and hundreds wounded.

I wish these were isolated cases, but I could provide countless other examples, from Afghanistan, to India, to Saudi Arabia. We're fortunate to live in a country that was founded by religious refugees on principles of tolerance, but it is important that we do everything we can to ensure that religious minorities elsewhere in the world enjoy the freedoms and protections they deserve, the freedoms and protections enjoyed by all Americans. Appointing this special envoy will be an

important step in that direction, and I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the distinguished chairman of the Subcommittee on Commerce-Justice-Science for the Appropriations Committee, the author of H.R. 440, the gentleman from Virginia, FRANK WOLF.

(Mr. WOLF asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I want to thank Chairman ROSLEHTINEN for her support, Mr. BERMAN for his support, and Mr. SMITH for his help. I also want to thank some key staff members whose hard work and efforts on the bill have not gone unnoticed: Elyse Anderson, Kalinda Stephenson, Yleem Poblete, Steve Stombres, and also Kyle Nevins with the majority leader's office. They have been very, very helpful, and I am grateful for their help.

This past January, in the wake of increasing violence, targeted attacks, and heightened discrimination against Christians and other religious minorities in Iraq and Egypt, and persistent concerns in Afghanistan and Pakistan, among other nations, I introduced bipartisan legislation, H.R. 440, which would require the administration to appoint a special envoy to advocate for religious minorities in the Middle East and South Central Asia in order to make this issue a foreign policy priority.

Since introduction, this legislation has garnered widespread bipartisan support with nearly 80 cosponsors. I want to thank ANNA ESHOO, the lead Democrat in the House, for her work on this. Also, companion legislation has been introduced now by Senators ROY BLUNT and CARL LEVIN. The legislation has also been championed by a host of faith-based organizations and diaspora communities, who recognize the importance of ensuring that the vulnerable communities have an advocate within the U.S. Government and around the world.

Shortly before introducing this legislation, I chaired a hearing at the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission on the recent spate of attacks and the ongoing persecution of Christians in Iraq and Egypt. Commission members heard testimony about the increasing sectarian tensions in the two countries and the need for greater U.S. attention to the plight of religious minorities. The hearing was held prior to recent events in the Middle East which have, in some cases, created a political vacuum that have left religious minorities particularly vulnerable. I heard this fear expressed time and again during a recent trip to Egypt.

Religious minorities throughout the region, including those who are Jewish, Ahmadis, Baha'is, are under increasing pressure. In fact, many of these ancient faith communities have been forced to flee the lands that they have inhabited for centuries.

Consider some of the following:

Last October, at least 70 people were killed during a siege on Our Lady of Salvation Church in Baghdad, making it the worst massacre of Iraqi Christians since 2003.

Iraq's once vibrant Christian community population has been reduced by at least half since 2003. This would be tragic under any circumstances, but it is especially so given the rich ancestral heritage of this indigenous community.

Apart from Israel, the lands and peoples of modern-day Iraq are mentioned with greater frequency in the Bible than any other country. Abraham, Jonah, Nineveh, Esther, and Daniel all hail from Iraq. The Christians of Iraq today still speak Aramaic, the language that Jesus spoke.

In Afghanistan and Pakistan, countries where the United States has invested its treasure and the lives of countless brave American soldiers, persecution of Christians runs rampant.

On November 7 last year, a Pakistani court sentenced Aasia Bibi, a Christian mother of five, to death for the crime of blasphemy. Only after intervention by the international community was her execution delayed. Her fate still remains, at this moment, unclear.

Pakistan's blasphemy laws are often used to victimize both religious minorities and Muslims. Earlier this year, Punjab's influential Governor, Salman Taseer, was shot and killed by his own bodyguard, who reportedly told police that he, quote, killed Mr. Taseer because of the Governor's opposition to Pakistan's blasphemy law.

In April, Pakistan's Federal Minister for Minority Affairs, Shahbaz Bhatti, a heroic man of faith whose courageous and outspoken leadership against his nation's draconian blasphemy law made him a prime target of extremist Islamist elements in his country, was assassinated. Bhatti was the only Christian member of the Pakistani Cabinet.

□ 1250

In an interview with The Washington Post's Fred Hiatt, Shahbaz Bhatti "urged Americans not to forsake or forget" Pakistan's suffering religious minority community.

Members of the Jewish faith continue to experience discrimination and persecution throughout the region. The Special Envoy for Anti-Semitism, Hannah Rosenthal, has noted that Holocaust glorification "is especially virulent in the Middle East media."

If the international community fails to speak out, the prospects for religious pluralism and tolerance in the region are bleak. I urge my colleagues' support for this bill, and again thank the leadership on both sides for making this legislation a priority. I am hopeful that this bill will overwhelmingly pass the House and send a clear and unequivocal message to both the persecutors and the persecuted that the United States of America stands with those whose most basic freedom—the right to

worship according to the dictates of conscience—is under assault.

Mr. BERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. ESHOO), who brought this bill to my attention and has worked with the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WOLF) to put it together and bring it to this point. She is deeply committed on this issue and a very great Member of Congress.

Ms. ESHOO. I thank Mr. BERMAN, our distinguished ranking member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, for not only yielding me this time but for his conscience, because that indeed is what this is about, and his unflagging leadership on so many issues. Your endorsement and strong support of this bill I think bolsters it enormously, and says to the entire House that a person that is steeped in the background of the issues of the entire world is for this.

I want to pay tribute to Mr. WOLF for his incredible advocacy on this issue relative to religious minorities for so long. It is an honor to have worked with you to bring this to a realization of not only legislation but to bring it to the floor. I salute you. You are a gentleman; and you, too, are a man of great conscience.

Mr. Speaker, I think today we are here on something that really distinguishes the United States of America. From the founding of our Nation, religious freedom has been a pillar of our democracy, and it remains one of the most critical exports of our great Nation. I think having said that really establishes the foundation of why we are here in strong support of H.R. 440. This bill, as my colleagues have said, will create a special envoy to promote religious freedom of religious minorities in the Near East and South Asia. The legislation responds to the very urgent needs of Christians and other religious minorities who are under siege. When I say that, I underscore it. They are under siege in the Middle East. Again, I commend everyone, especially Mr. WOLF, who has been part of this effort. And as a cochair of the Religious Minorities Caucus and all of the members of it, I thank them as well.

In January of this year, Representative WOLF chaired a hearing to review the violence and the hardships faced by Middle Eastern religious minorities. I was privileged to testify that day about the plight of many people, but most especially the Assyrians. I am of both Assyrian and Armenian descent, and the language Mr. WOLF spoke of, Aramaic, I speak fluently and understand very well. It is the language, as he said, that Jesus spoke. These are the world's oldest Christians, and they are quickly disappearing from Iraq. During this hearing, we also learned of Egypt's Coptic Christian population and the renewed threats they face and unacceptable violence in that uncertain political situation.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentlewoman has expired.

Mr. BERMAN. I yield the gentlewoman 2 additional minutes.

Ms. ESHOO. At the conclusion of the hearing, we agreed to press forward with this legislation to create a special envoy at the State Department, someone at the ambassador level to elevate this issue for the attention it deserves. We need a high-level official dedicated to religious freedom in the region, committed to addressing the concerns of the minority communities.

I am very, very pleased that this legislation has attracted very solid bipartisan support. We have 78 cosponsors, an even split between Republicans and Democrats, all calling for the State Department to elevate religious freedom in the Middle East as a diplomatic priority. There is a history for this. Senator John Danforth served our Nation as special envoy to Sudan, and Senator George Mitchell as special envoy to Northern Ireland, so there is precedent for this.

I want to speak of a meeting I had in my office last week. Three Dominican nuns, sisters who traveled from Iraq, and they once again relayed their story of what is happening to them. They have been dispersed across Iraq. They teach everyone regardless of their background, Muslims, Christians, no matter what the background is. And in their hospitals, they care for whomever is sick and wounded. And yet their convents have been burned, the statue of the Blessed Mother's hands chopped off and placed at their door. So these threats are very real. They are very real. That is just one example of it.

So this history of violence must and should be dealt with. As I said, our great Nation, our great Nation treasures its religious freedoms, and it is part of the core of our democracy. So that's why I urge all of my colleagues to join us, not just me but all of us, in supporting this important legislation. The message that will go forward from this Chamber, with all of the other issues that are swirling around us, is that we stand with great dignity for one of the great principles of our great Nation.

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

Mr. BERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from Illinois (Ms. SCHAKOWSKY), who both here and abroad fights against persecution and discrimination against religious minorities.

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. I thank the gentleman for yielding to me.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 440, a bill to provide for the establishment of a special envoy to promote religious freedom of religious minorities in the Near East and South Central Asia. I want to thank my colleagues, Congressman FRANK WOLF and Congresswoman ESHOO, for introducing this legislation and for their tireless leadership on this critical issue.

Ethno-religious minorities continue to face a crisis in Iraq, where attacks

and violence against Christians continue. My district is home to a large and vibrant Assyrian population, and they regularly share with me the devastating stories of their friends and family members still living in Iraq who are facing threats because of their faith. In November 2010, over 1,500 protesters demonstrated in Chicago, sending a powerful message about the need to protect Iraqi minorities.

By creating a special envoy specifically focused on the rights of religious minorities in the region, this legislation is an important step toward ending the cycle of violence.

To date, the U.S. Government and the international community unfortunately have failed to provide security for Iraqi ethno-religious minorities. Iraqi Christians continue to fear for their physical safety, as well as for the survival of their communities and culture. Of a population that numbered 1.4 million people before the American-led invasion, there are now less than 500,000 Iraqi Christians in the country.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 440 is a critical step toward addressing the threat against Iraqi ethno-religious minorities. I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this bill.

□ 1300

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Chairman, I yield 1 minute to the distinguished gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DOLD).

Mr. DOLD. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Since 1947, 49 million Hindus in Bangladesh have gone missing, according to Professor Sachi Dastidar. A recent Hindu American Foundation report concluded that the "Hindus of Bangladesh continue to be victims of daily acts of murder, rape, kidnapping, temple destruction, and physical intimidation."

Dr. Richard Benkin, an authority on human rights abuses in Bangladesh, has described to me on several occasions the atrocities and human rights abuses suffered by Bangladeshi Hindus that he personally has verified. Other groups, like the Christian Assyrians in Iraq's Nineveh province, the suffering of the Baha'i prisoners in Iran, and millions of others who seek to practice their religion in peace, look to the United States as a beacon of hope. I believe this bill helps us answer that important call. H.R. 440 will create a powerful diplomatic tool for the promotion of religious freedom and human rights in the volatile regions of the Near East and South Central Asia.

I thank the gentleman for his bill, and I urge support for this meaningful legislation.

Mr. BERMAN. I am pleased to yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. PETERS).

Mr. PETERS. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased today to rise in support of H.R. 440, a bill to establish a special envoy to promote religious freedom of religious minorities in the Near East and

South Central Asia. As a cosponsor of this bipartisan legislation and as a member of the Religious Minorities of the Middle East Caucus, I strongly support its passage.

While many parts of the Near East and Southeast Asia are predominantly Muslim, historically these areas have been home to a diverse group of ethnic and religious minorities. Whether it is Chaldeans, Syrians, and Assyrians in Iraq, Baha'i in Iran, Copts in Egypt, or the Hindus in Pakistan, religious minorities have for centuries lived and worshipped alongside their Muslim countrymen and women.

Unfortunately, instability in the Middle East has had a disproportionately negative impact on religious minorities. The most striking example of this has been in Iraq, where more than half of the Iraqi Christian population has been forced to flee the country since the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Those who have stayed have been specifically targeted in gruesome and random acts of violence, such as murder, rape, and abduction.

This includes religious and community leaders like Archbishop Rahho, who was kidnapped and murdered. Religious minorities have also suffered attacks in their places of worship, such as the October 2010 massacre at Our Lady of Salvation Church in Baghdad, in which 58 worshipers were killed by militants and extremists.

While the end of the Mubarak regime in Egypt has brought about the promise for democratic reform, it has also given rise to instability and acts of violence against religious minorities. Coptic Christians have lived peacefully in this part of the world for centuries. Sadly, in recent months, Coptic churches and protesters have also been targeted for violence.

Freedom of religion is something we take for granted here in the United States. Our citizens are free to worship however they please, without fear that they will be targeted for violence because of their religious beliefs. I'm honored to represent Michigan's Ninth Congressional District, which is home to an amazingly diverse population. We have Jewish synagogues, Islamic mosques, Hindu temples, and Christian churches of almost every kind imaginable. This diversity is a source of strength in our community, and something my constituents are very proud of. Many of my constituents have relatives in Near East or South Central Asia and they wish that they, too, had the same freedom to worship that so many of us take for granted. They are desperate to see the United States take more leadership in promoting religious tolerance overseas.

That is why the legislation we're debating today is so important. It creates a permanent special envoy that will work on behalf of the President and the Secretary of State to advance the cause of religious minorities abroad. This individual will be able to ensure that the United States is fully engaged

to fight to protect religious minorities in other countries and to help hold our own government accountable when that should be done.

I would like to thank Representative WOLF, who is not only the author of this legislation but also the cochair of the Religious Minorities of the Middle East, a tireless champion on behalf of vulnerable populations. I would also like to thank my friend, Representative ESHOO, who is also a cochair of the caucus and a true champion for religious minorities in the Middle East.

I urge my colleagues to support this legislation so that the United States will be vigilant in promoting religious tolerance and freedom around the world.

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

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

I simply ask the House to pass what is I think an important bill because we only have to read what is going on recently to understand this is a rapidly increasing and severe problem that affects those countries deeply in terms of the conflict's intentions. I think much good can come from having someone focused on these issues in that region.

I urge an "aye" vote, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. I yield 1½ minutes to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. PITTS).

Mr. PITTS. I rise to urge this Chamber to support H.R. 440, a bill that requires the President to appoint a special envoy at the State Department to advocate for religious minorities in the Near East and South Central Asia. I commend the gentleman for his leadership on this matter.

I have personally met with oppressed people from all over the globe, but predominantly ones from the Near East and South Asia. The region has long been a hot-bed of religious discrimination, and little has been done by our government to aid these innocent practitioners of faith. Revolutions striving for democracy and greater expression in the region have been matched by a wake of religious intolerance and extremism. As we cherish our right to the free expression of religion here at home, our State Department needs to reflect our dedication to protecting this right in our diplomatic engagements abroad.

Religious minorities in Egypt, Iraq, Iran, and countless other countries are left without an advocate in the political process of their respective governments. H.R. 440 would provide an envoy that can advocate for these religious minorities and focus solely on their plight while being able to avoid bureaucratic red tape. As basic human rights are increasingly under assault in this region, our government needs to rapidly respond to the new challenges rapidly emerging. It is in our strategic interest to pass this legislation. I ask the Members to join me in supporting it.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. 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 H.R. 440.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. I yield 1 minute to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. ZOE LOFGREN).

Ms. ZOE LOFGREN of California. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

This is a bipartisan bill, which I support. I would just note—and I know the gentleman's long history with mine of advocating for human rights and religious freedom in Vietnam. I hope that we can follow up this great effort with a similar effort really specifically oriented toward the religious oppression that's going on in Vietnam against the Buddhists, against the Cao Dai, against the Catholics and many others. I commend the gentleman for this bill. I just wanted to raise that issue in the hopes that it can be addressed at a later date.

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

Mr. Speaker, the issue of religious freedom for minorities in the Middle East and South Central Asia must be of the highest priority. For far too long, religious minorities and the persecution and marginalization they endure has been overlooked, even trivialized. Their rights and even their very lives must now be assiduously protected in this time of political upheaval, especially in the Middle East.

Mr. WOLF had the foresight to draft this bill before the so-called Arab Spring. It was needed in January. It's even more needed now, especially in light of the spate of church bombings and escalated persecution against believers, especially with kidnappings of thousands each and every year of Coptic Christian teenage girls, who are then forced to convert to Islam and forced to "marry" a Muslim man.

□ 1310

Make no mistake, Mr. Speaker. The Middle East is at a critical juncture. We are witnessing the systematic extinction of centuries-old religious communities. South and Central Asia are also systematically failing their religious minorities.

The late Shahbaz Bhatti, Federal Minister for Minorities in Pakistan, gave his life to fight the injustices and atrocities suffered by the religious minorities in Pakistan. The Government of Pakistan has since abolished the Ministry for Minorities, perhaps under the false impression that it does not matter in relations with the United States.

A Special Envoy for religious minorities sends the right message at the right time, and empowers a diplomat with access to the President and to, hopefully, all the leaders throughout

the region and to all those who are disenfranchised. The rights of religious minorities matter, and we will not look askance during this perilous time.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise as a cosponsor of H.R. 440, a bill to establish a Special Envoy to promote religious freedom for minorities in the Near East and South Central Asia, because no one should be made to feel that the practice of their religion is a crime or a source of shame.

Around the world, people are persecuted in the name of one religion against another. Such persecution not only violates their inalienable right to worship as they choose; it also creates instability in many places around the world. Many conflicts are rooted in sectarian differences and rivalries. To the extent the United States can promote religious tolerance, we advance the cause of human rights, justice and peace around the globe.

This bill creates a special envoy in order to monitor and combat acts of religious intolerance and incitement targeted against religious minorities and to work with foreign governments to address laws that are inherently discriminatory toward religious minority communities.

As we speak, there are minorities all over the world who live in fear for their lives merely because they practice a different religion than those around them. I encourage my colleagues to join me in support of H.R. 440.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. 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 bill, H.R. 440, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

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 motion will be postponed.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess for a period of less than 15 minutes.

Accordingly (at 1 o'clock and 12 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

□ 1315

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. SMITH of New Jersey) at 1 o'clock and 15 minutes p.m.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2012

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SMITH of New Jersey). Pursuant to

House Resolution 363 and rule XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for the further consideration of the bill, H.R. 2584.

□ 1316

IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly, the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for the further consideration of the bill (H.R. 2584) making appropriations for the Department of the Interior, environment, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2012, and for other purposes, with Mr. ROGERS of Alabama (Acting Chair) in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The Acting CHAIR. When the Committee of the Whole rose on Tuesday, July 26, 2011, the bill had been read through page 56, line 22.

Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, proceedings will now resume on those amendments on which further proceedings were postponed, in the following order:

An amendment by Mr. CLARKE of Michigan.

An amendment by Mr. DICKS of Washington.

An amendment by Mr. TONKO of New York.

Amendment No. 5 by Mr. AMASH of Michigan.

An amendment by Mr. DOLD of Illinois.

Amendment No. 44 by Mr. REED of New York.

An amendment, as modified, by Mr. SCALISE of Louisiana.

The Chair will reduce to 2 minutes the time for any electronic vote after the first vote in this series.

AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. CLARKE OF MICHIGAN

The Acting CHAIR. The unfinished business is the demand for a recorded vote on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. CLARKE) on which further proceedings were postponed and on which the noes prevailed by voice vote.

The Clerk will redesignate the amendment.

The Clerk redesignated the amendment.

RECORDED VOTE

The Acting CHAIR. A recorded vote has been demanded.

A recorded vote was ordered.

The vote was taken by electronic device, and there were—ayes 173, noes 251, not voting 8, as follows:

[Roll No. 651]

AYES—173

Ackerman
Altmire
Andrews
Baca
Baldwin
Bass (CA)
Becerra
Benishak
Berkley
Berman
Biggert
Bishop (GA)

Bishop (NY)
Blumenauer
Boswell
Brady (PA)
Brady (IA)
Brown (FL)
Butterfield
Camp
Capps
Capuano
Carnahan
Carney

Carson (IN)
Chu
Cicilline
Clarke (MI)
Clarke (NY)
Clay
Cleaver
Clyburn
Cohen
Conyers
Costello
Courtney

Critz
Crowley
Cuellar
Davis (CA)
Davis (IL)
DeFazio
DeGette
DeLauro
Deutch
Ellison
Engel
Eshoo
Farr
Fattah
Filner
Frank (MA)
Fudge
Garamendi
Gibson
Grijalva
Gutierrez
Hahn
Hanabusa
Hastings (FL)
Higgins
Himes
Hinojosa
Hirono
Hochul
Holt
Honda
Hoyer
Huizenga (MI)
Inslie
Israel
Jackson (IL)
Johnson (GA)
Johnson, E. B.
Kaptur
Keating
Kildee
Kind

Kucinich
Langevin
Larsen (WA)
Larson (CT)
Lee (CA)
Levin
Lewis (GA)
Lipinski
Loebsock
Lofgren, Zoe
Lowey
Lynch
Maloney
Markey
Matsui
McCarthy (NY)
McDermott
McGovern
Meeks
Michaud
Miller (MI)
Miller (NC)
Miller, George
Moore
Murphy (CT)
Nadler
Napolitano
Neal
Oliver
Owens
Pallone
Pascrell
Pastor (AZ)
Paulsen
Payne
Pelosi
Peters
Peterson
Petri
Pingree (ME)
Polis
Price (NC)
Quigley
Rangel
Reed
Rogers (MI)
Rothman (NJ)

Roybal-Allard
Ruppersberger
Rush
Ryan (OH)
Ryan (WI)
Sánchez, Linda T.
Sanchez, Loretta
Sarbanes
Schakowsky
Schrader
Schwartz
Scott (VA)
Scott, David
Sensenbrenner
Serrano
Sewell
Shuler
Sires
Slaughter
Smith (WA)
Speier
Sutton
Thompson (CA)
Thompson (MS)
Thompson
Tonko
Townes
Tsongas
Upton
Van Hollen
Velázquez
Visclosky
Walberg
Walz (MN)
Wasserman
Schultz
Waters
Watt
Waxman
Welch
Wilson (FL)
Woolsey
Wu
Yarmuth

NOES—251

Adams
Aderholt
Akin
Alexander
Amash
Austria
Bachus
Barletta
Barrow
Bartlett
Barton (TX)
Bass (NH)
Berg
Bilbray
Billirakis
Bishop (UT)
Black
Blackburn
Bonner
Bono Mack
Boren
Boustany
Brady (TX)
Brooks
Brown (GA)
Buchanan
Bucshon
Burgess
Burton (IN)
Calvert
Campbell
Canseco
Cantor
Capito
Cardoza
Carter
Cassidy
Castor (FL)
Chabot
Chaffetz
Chandler
Coble
Coffman (CO)
Cole
Conaway
Connolly (VA)
Cooper
Cravaack
Crawford
Crenshaw

Culberson
Cummings
Davis (KY)
Denham
Dent
DesJarlais
Diaz-Balart
Doggett
Dold
Donnelly (IN)
Dreier
Duncan (SC)
Duncan (TN)
Ellmers
Emerson
Farenthold
Fincher
Fitzpatrick
Flake
Fleischmann
Fleming
Flores
Forbes
Fortenberry
Foxo
Franks (AZ)
Frelinghuysen
Gallegly
Gardner
Garrett
Gerlach
Gibbs
Gingrey (GA)
Gohmert
Gonzalez
Goodlatte
Gosar
Gowdy
Granger
Graves (GA)
Graves (MO)
Green, Al
Green, Gene
Griffin (AR)
Griffith (VA)
Grimm
Guinta
Guthrie
Hall
Hanna

Harper
Harris
Hartzler
Hastings (WA)
Hayworth
Heck
Heinrich
Hensarling
Herger
Herrera Beutler
Holden
Huelskamp
Hultgren
Hunter
Hurt
Issa
Jackson Lee
(TX)
Jenkins
Johnson (IL)
Johnson (OH)
Johnson, Sam
Jones
Jordan
Kelly
King (IA)
King (NY)
Kingston
Kinzinger (IL)
Kissell
Kline
Labrador
Lamborn
Lance
Lankford
Latham
LaTourette
Latta
Lewis (CA)
LoBiondo
Long
Lucas
Luetkemeyer
Lujan
Lummis
Lungren, Daniel E.
Mack
Manzullo
Marchant