

seq.) or a regulation promulgated under such Act. The Commission shall enforce this section and the regulations promulgated under this section in the same manner, by the same means, and with the same jurisdiction, powers, and duties as though all applicable terms and provisions of the Communications Act of 1934 were incorporated into and made a part of this section.

(i) EXEMPTIONS.—

(1) CERTAIN RULEMAKING REQUIREMENTS.—Section 553 of title 5, United States Code, shall not apply to a regulation promulgated under this section or a rulemaking proceeding to promulgate such a regulation.

(2) PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT REQUIREMENTS.—A collection of information conducted or sponsored under the regulations required under this section shall not constitute a collection of information for the purposes of subchapter I of chapter 35 of title 44, United States Code (commonly known as the “Paperwork Reduction Act”).

(j) REPORT TO CONGRESS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 3 years after establishing the grant program under this section, the Commission shall submit to Congress a report evaluating the effectiveness of the grant program.

(2) CONTENTS.—The report submitted under paragraph (1) shall include—

(A) the number of individuals notified of covered program eligibility by States receiving grants under this section;

(B) the number of new applicants to a covered program from States receiving grants under this section, including the number of those applicants who enrolled in a covered program; and

(C) the cost-effectiveness of the grant program established under this section.

(k) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated to the Commission such sums as may be necessary to carry out this section for the first 5 full fiscal years beginning after the establishment of the grant program under this section.

SEC. 3. GRANTS TO STATES TO STRENGTHEN NATIONAL LIFELINE ELIGIBILITY VERIFIER.

(a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) COMMISSION.—The term “Commission” means the Federal Communications Commission.

(2) ELIGIBLE ENTITY.—The term “eligible entity” means a State that, not later than 30 days after the date of enactment of this Act, submits to the Commission an application for a grant under this section containing such information as the Commission may require.

(3) STATE.—The term “State” means each State of the United States, the District of Columbia, each commonwealth, territory, or possession of the United States, and each federally recognized Indian Tribe.

(b) ESTABLISHMENT.—Not later than 90 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Commission shall establish a program to provide a grant, from amounts appropriated under subsection (e), to each eligible entity for the purpose described in subsection (c).

(c) PURPOSE.—The Commission shall make a grant to each eligible entity for the purpose of establishing, renewing, reestablishing, or maintaining or amending a connection between the databases of the eligible entity that contain information concerning the receipt by a household, or a member of a household, of benefits under a program administered by the eligible entity (including any benefit provided under the supplemental nutrition assistance program under the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2011 et seq.)) and the National Lifeline Eligibility Verifier so that the receipt by a household, or a member of a household, of benefits under the benefits program—

(1) is reflected in the National Lifeline Eligibility Verifier; and

(2) can be used to verify eligibility for—

(A) the Lifeline program established under subpart E, part 54, of title 47, Code of Federal Regulations, or any successor regulation; and

(B) the Affordable Connectivity Program established under section 904(b) of division N of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (47 U.S.C. 1752(b)), or any successor program.

(d) DISBURSEMENT OF GRANT FUNDS.—Not later than 120 days after the date on which the Commission establishes the program under subsection (b), funds provided under each grant made under such subsection shall be disbursed to the eligible entity receiving such grant.

(e) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATION.—There is authorized to be appropriated such sums as may be necessary to carry out this section.

SUBMITTED RESOLUTIONS

SENATE RESOLUTION 395—RECOGNIZING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE MONTAGNARD INDIGENOUS TRIBESPEOPLE OF THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS OF VIETNAM TO THE UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES DURING THE VIETNAM WAR, AND CONDEMNING THE ONGOING VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS BY THE GOVERNMENT OF THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM

Mr. TILLIS (for himself and Mr. BUDD) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations:

S. RES. 395

Whereas the Montagnards are an indigenous tribespeople living in Vietnam's Central Highlands region;

Whereas the Montagnards were driven into the mountains by invading Vietnamese and Cambodians in the 9th century;

Whereas French Roman Catholic missionaries converted many of the Montagnards in the 19th century and American Protestant missionaries subsequently converted many to various Protestant denominations;

Whereas, during the 1960s, the United States Mission in Saigon, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and United States Army Special Forces, also known as the Green Berets, trained the Montagnards in unconventional warfare;

Whereas an estimated 61,000 Montagnards, out of an estimated population of 1,000,000, fought alongside the United States and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) forces against the North Vietnamese Army and the Viet Cong;

Whereas the Central Intelligence Agency, United States Special Forces, and the Montagnards cooperated on the Village Defense Program, a forerunner to the War's Strategic Hamlet Program, and an estimated 43,000 Montagnards were organized into “Civilian Irregular Defense Groups” (CIDGs) to provide protection for the areas around the CIDGs' operational bases;

Whereas, at its peak, the CIDGs had approximately 50 operational bases, with each base containing a contingent of two United States Army officers and ten enlisted men, and an ARVN unit of the same size, and each base trained 200 to 700 Montagnards, or “strikers”;

Whereas another 18,000 Montagnards were reportedly enlisted into mobile strike forces,

and various historical accounts describe a strong bond between the United States Special Forces and the Montagnards, in contrast to Vietnamese Special Forces and ARVN troops;

Whereas the lives of thousands of members of the United States Armed Forces were saved as a result of the heroic actions of the Montagnards, who fought loyally and bravely alongside United States Special Forces in the Vietnam War;

Whereas, after the fall of the Republic of Vietnam in 1975, thousands of Montagnards fled across the border into Cambodia to escape persecution;

Whereas the government of the reunified Vietnamese nation, renamed the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, deeply distrusted the Montagnards who had sided with the United States and ARVN forces and subjected them to imprisonment and various forms of discrimination and oppression after the Vietnam War ended;

Whereas, after the Vietnam War, the United States Government resettled large numbers of Montagnards, mostly in North Carolina, and an estimated several thousand Montagnards currently reside in North Carolina, which is the largest population of Montagnards residing outside of Vietnam;

Whereas the Socialist Republic of Vietnam currently remains a one-party state, ruled and controlled by the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), which continues to restrict freedom of religion or belief, movement, land and property rights, and political expression;

Whereas officials of the Government of Vietnam have forced Montagnards to publicly denounce their religion, arrested and imprisoned Montagnards who organized public demonstrations, and mistreated Montagnards in detention;

Whereas some Montagnard Americans have complained that Vietnamese authorities either have prevented them from visiting Vietnam or have subjected them to interrogation upon re-entering the country on visits;

Whereas the Department of State's 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices (in this resolution referred to as the “2022 Human Rights Report”) documents that not all members of ethnic minorities were able to engage in decisions affecting their lands, cultures, and traditions, even though ethnic minority group members constituted a sizeable percentage of the population in certain areas, including the Northwest, the Central Highlands, and portions of the Mekong Delta;

Whereas the 2022 Human Rights Report states that although Vietnamese law prohibits violence and discrimination against ethnic minorities, such social discrimination was longstanding and persistent, including in the Central Highlands;

Whereas the 2022 Human Rights Report documents that Vietnamese authorities monitored, harassed, and intimidated members of certain ethnic minority groups, particularly ethnoreligious minorities in the Central and Northwest Highland;

Whereas the 2022 Human Rights Report documents that Vietnamese authorities used national security laws to impose lengthy prison sentences on members of ethnic minorities for their connections to overseas organizations the government claimed espoused separatist aims;

Whereas the 2022 Human Rights Report documents that land expropriation and preferential government treatment for non-indigenous residents in these areas was common, despite the government previously allocating land to ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands;

Whereas the Department of State's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report documents that Montagnard Christians reported

being summoned, arrested, and fined by police in Dak Lak Province related to inquiries about legally registering their religious group, commemorating International Religious Freedom Day in 2021, and communication with international diplomatic missions and religious freedom nongovernmental organizations;

Whereas the Department of State's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report documents accounts from a Montagnard Christian in Gia Lai Province that during the year, he was interrogated by police, detained, and beaten multiple times while authorities repeatedly demanded that he renounce affiliation with his church, including an incident in which police burned his Bible and other religious materials, placed the embers on his face, and hung him from the ceiling and beat him with a stick for hours;

Whereas the Department of State's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report documents that police prevented Montagnard Christians from gathering during important religious holidays such as Easter and Christmas or forced them to take down their decorations for Christmas;

Whereas the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) references in its 2023 Annual Report many reports of local authorities harassing members of unregistered Montagnard Protestant groups, disrupting and banning their peaceful religious activities, interrogating and threatening them with imprisonment, imposing heavy fines, and coercing them to denounce and leave their denominations and instead join state-controlled Protestant organizations;

Whereas the 2023 USCIRF Report documents many reports of local authorities harassing members of unregistered Montagnard Protestant groups, disrupting and banning their peaceful religious activities, interrogating and threatening them with imprisonment, imposing heavy fines, and coercing them to denounce and leave their denominations and instead join state-controlled Protestant organizations;

Whereas the 2019 USCIRF Report documents that one-quarter of prisoners of conscience were minority religious groups, including Montagnard Christians;

Whereas the 2019 USCIRF Report estimates that 10,000 individuals in the Central Highlands are refused ID cards, household registration, and birth certificates by local authorities in retaliation for refusing to renounce their faith;

Whereas USCIRF has recommended every year since 2002 that Vietnam be designated a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (Public Law 105-292) due to "systematic, ongoing, egregious violations of religious freedom"; and

Whereas, on November 30, 2022, in accordance with the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, the Secretary of State placed Vietnam on the Special Watch List (SWL) for having engaged in or tolerated "severe violations of religious freedom"; Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) recognizes the contributions of the Montagnards who fought loyally and bravely with United States Armed Forces during the Vietnam War and who continue to suffer persecution in Vietnam as a result of this relationship;

(2) condemns ongoing actions by the Government of Vietnam to suppress basic human rights and civil liberties for all its citizens;

(3) calls on the Government of Vietnam to allow human rights groups access to all regions of the country and to end restrictions of basic human rights, including the right for Montagnards to practice their Christian

faith freely, the right to land and property, freedom of movement, the right to retain ethnic identity and culture, and access to an adequate standard of living; and

(4) urges the President and Congress to develop policies that support Montagnards and other marginalized ethnic minority and indigenous populations in Vietnam and reflect United States interests and commitment to upholding human rights and democracy abroad.

SENATE RESOLUTION 396—DESIGNATING THE WEEK BEGINNING ON OCTOBER 8, 2023, AS "NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE WEEK"

Mr. COONS (for himself, Mr. KENNEDY, Ms. HIRONO, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Mr. REED, Mr. CARPER, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, Mr. MANCHIN, Mr. KING, and Mr. CARDIN) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary:

S. RES. 396

Whereas the United States Fish and Wildlife Service administers the National Wildlife Refuge System to conserve, manage, and, where appropriate, restore fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of current and future generations;

Whereas, in 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt established the first national wildlife refuge on Pelican Island in Florida;

Whereas the National Wildlife Refuge System is administered by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and has grown to include 568 national wildlife refuges, 38 wetland management districts, and 5 marine national monuments with units located in every State and territory of the United States;

Whereas the National Wildlife Refuge System encompasses more than 850,000,000 acres of unique habitats and ecosystems, including tropical and boreal forests, wetlands, deserts, grasslands, arctic tundras, remote islands, and marine areas, and spans 12 time zones from the United States Virgin Islands to Guam;

Whereas national wildlife refuges support approximately 800 species of birds, 220 species of mammals, 250 species of reptiles and amphibians, and 1,100 species of fish;

Whereas national wildlife refuges provide protection to more than 380 threatened species and endangered species;

Whereas 65 national wildlife refuges were established to conserve species considered to be threatened or endangered under Federal standards, including the American crocodile, California condor, Devil's Hole pupfish, and Antioch Dunes evening primrose;

Whereas national wildlife refuges are the primary Federal lands that support waterfowl habitat;

Whereas, since 1934, the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund has generated more than \$2,000,000,000 and enabled the conservation of more than 6,300,000 acres of habitat for waterfowl and numerous other species in the National Wildlife Refuge System;

Whereas national wildlife refuges protect and conserve climate-resilient habitats that support biodiversity and provide nature-based solutions;

Whereas more than 180 national wildlife refuges conserve marine, coastal, and Great Lakes habitats, helping to protect communities by reducing the risk of storm-surge flooding, especially in low-lying floodplain and coastal areas;

Whereas many national wildlife refuges are managed to reduce wildfire risk by thinning

overgrown forests and removing invasive species;

Whereas meaningful engagement and proactive collaboration with Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, Alaska Native organizations, and the Native Hawaiian community is an integral aspect of the co-stewardship of our shared natural resources, including National Wildlife Refuge System lands and waters;

Whereas important cultural and historic resources are protected on national wildlife refuges, including—

(1) archaeological sites detailing the lives of Native Americans and early colonists at Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge in Virginia;

(2) World War II sites in the Pacific, from Attu in Alaska to Midway Atoll in the Hawaiian Islands; and

(3) the remains of the home of the father of Harriet Tubman at Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge in Maryland;

Whereas Tribal consultation is a cornerstone of historic preservation on national wildlife refuges where cultural resources and traditional sacred spaces are important to Native American Tribes, including Pahranaagat National Wildlife Refuge in Nevada, where the Nuwuvu people finalized a plan with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to respect and showcase ancient petroglyphs;

Whereas national wildlife refuges use a range of management tools, including fire management, invasive species control, water management, wildlife health assessments, inventory and monitoring species, facility condition assessments, 5-year infrastructure project plans, and other tools to conserve habitat and ensure opportunities for public access and recreation;

Whereas national wildlife refuges are important recreational and tourism destinations in communities across the United States, and offer a variety of recreational opportunities, including sustainable hunting and fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation;

Whereas the National Wildlife Refuge System receives nearly 68,000,000 annual visits that—

(1) generate more than \$3,200,000,000 for local economies; and

(2) support 41,000 jobs;

Whereas the National Wildlife Refuge System hosts more than 42,000,000 annual birding and wildlife observation visits;

Whereas national wildlife refuges are important to local businesses and gateway communities;

Whereas, for every dollar appropriated to the National Wildlife Refuge System, an average of approximately 5 dollars is returned to local economies;

Whereas 436 units of the National Wildlife Refuge System have hunting programs and 378 units have fishing programs that support, respectively, more than 2,600,000 hunting visits and more than 8,600,000 fishing visits annually;

Whereas national wildlife refuges provide an important opportunity for children to discover and gain a greater appreciation for the natural world;

Whereas more than 15,000 volunteers and approximately 180 national wildlife refuge "Friends" organizations contribute approximately 818,000 volunteer hours annually, the equivalent of 400 full-time employees, and provide an important link between national wildlife refuges and local communities;

Whereas 101 units of the National Wildlife Refuge System are within 25 miles of cities and suburbs where 80 percent of individuals in the United States live;