

□ 1457

Ms. FURSE, Ms. MCKINNEY, Mr. WILSON, and Mr. GRAHAM changed their vote from "yea" to "nay."

Mr. CHAPMAN changed his vote from "nay" to "yea".

So the conference report was agreed to.

The result of the vote was announced as above recorded.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

□ 1500

LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM

(Mr. BONIOR asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. BONIOR. Mr. Speaker, I rise to inquire of the distinguished majority leader of the schedule for the remainder of the week and for next week.

I yield to the gentleman from Texas [Mr. ARMEY], majority leader.

Mr. ARMEY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding to me.

Mr. Speaker, before I announce the program for next week, I would like to take a moment and inform the body that the distinguished chairman of the Committee on the Judiciary has just completed work on a very, very important piece of legislation on the day of his birthday. I think it would behoove us all to congratulate Chairman HYDE on his 49th birthday.

Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will continue to yield, I do appreciate the gentleman's indulgence with me.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to announce that we have now concluded our legislative business for the week. There will be no votes on Monday, April 22. On Tuesday, April 23, the House will meet at 12:30 p.m. for morning hour and 2 p.m. for legislative business.

Members should be advised, Mr. Speaker, that we do not expect any recorded votes before 5 p.m. on Tuesday next. As our first order of business on Tuesday, the House will consider two bills on the Corrections Day Calendar: H.R. 3049, to provide for the continuity of the Board of Trustees of the Institute of American Indian and Alaska Native Culture and Arts Development; and H.R. 3055, to permit continued participation by historically black graduate professional schools in the Grant Program.

After the corrections bills, we will then take up seven bills under suspension of the rules. I will not read the list now. I believe the gentleman has a copy before him, but a list of suspensions will be distributed to all Members' offices this afternoon.

After consideration of the suspensions on Tuesday, the House will dispose of the President's veto message for H.R. 1561, the American Overseas Interests Act of 1995.

On Wednesday, April 24, and Thursday, April 25, the House will take up the following items, all of which will be subject to rules: The conference re-

port for H.R. 3019, the fiscal year 1996 omnibus appropriations conference report; H.R. 2715, the Paperwork Elimination Act of 1995; and H.R. 1675, the National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act of 1995.

We should finish business and have Members on their way home to their families by 6 p.m. on Thursday, April 25. I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time.

Mr. BONIOR. Mr. Speaker, I would inquire of the gentleman from Texas a couple of points, if he would indulge me in a few questions.

The gentleman mentioned in his remarks that after consideration of the suspensions on Tuesday, the House will dispose of the President's veto message basically on the State Department Authorization Act. Will we vote on the veto override on Tuesday?

Mr. ARMEY. Mr. Speaker, yes, we will.

Mr. BONIOR. So this is not just a matter of sending it back to committee.

Mr. ARMEY. No, there will be a recorded vote.

Mr. BONIOR. I thank my colleague for that.

Mr. Speaker, can my friend from Texas, in light of what happened before we adjourned here for the Easter Passover recess, when the Chair was in error with respect to the motion on the previous question with respect to the minimum wage, can the gentleman assure our side that we will have an opportunity to vote on the issue of the minimum wage in the near future?

Mr. ARMEY. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will continue to yield, I was just asked by one of my colleagues a moment ago why is it the minority did not raise the minimum wage last year when they had the majority in the House and they had the majority in the Senate and they had the White House? Mr. Speaker, I suspect the reason is they read page 27 of Time magazine on February 6, 1995, where the President was quoted as saying that raising the minimum wage is, and I quote, "the wrong way to raise the incomes of the low wage workers." Perhaps they did not dispute the President at that time.

Mr. Speaker, I will say to the gentleman, I know of no consideration being given to this subject in any committee of jurisdiction of the House at this time. Consequently, I would see no basis by which I would anticipate a bill being reported out and a request being made to schedule floor time.

Mr. BONIOR. Mr. Speaker, I would say to my friend from Texas that his comments remind me of the comments that he made originally at the beginning of the session when he said, and I believe this is a direct quote, that he would fight the minimum wage with every fiber in his body. And the Speaker had said yesterday, at least according to the paper reports this morning, that the Republicans would not be able to duck, the word "duck" was used in many of the accounts in the papers this morning, this issue any further.

So I was just trying to find out how we could reconcile those two concerns and whether or not the people in this country who are choosing work over welfare and trying to raise a family on less than \$8,500 a year, can they expect any type of relief yet?

Mr. ARMEY. Mr. Speaker, I again will tell the gentleman that I know of no committee of this body that has jurisdiction on this subject that is considering any legislation on this subject. Obviously, I would have no basis to anticipate any committee reporting legislation or requesting floor time for consideration of such legislation.

Mr. BONIOR. Mr. Speaker, the only other comment I have on this subject, I would tell my friend from Texas that 70 percent of the bills that have come to this floor this year have not gone through committee. They have come right out of the Committee on Rules. So we hope and pray that in the near future those folks who are working hard and have children and are working for \$8,500 a year will be able to get the break they deserve.

One other question on the budget resolution, Mr. Speaker. Should we be finished with the budget resolution this week as the schedule calls for and the budget calendar for the year?

Mr. ARMEY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding. If the gentleman will continue to yield, I am told by the Committee on the Budget that they expect to be prepared to report a budget to the floor the week following next.

Mr. BONIOR. Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend and colleague.

ADJOURNMENT FROM FRIDAY, APRIL 19, TO MONDAY, APRIL 22, 1996

Mr. ARMEY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that when the House adjourns tomorrow, Friday, April 19, 1996, it adjourn to meet at 2 p.m. on Monday next.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PETRI). Is there objection to the request of gentleman from Texas?

There was no objection.

HOUR OF MEETING ON TUESDAY, APRIL 23, 1996

Mr. ARMEY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that when the House adjourns on Monday, April 22, 1996, it adjourn to meet at 12:30 p.m. on Tuesday, April 23, 1996, for morning hour debates.

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

There was no objection.

DISPENSING WITH CALENDAR WEDNESDAY BUSINESS ON WEDNESDAY NEXT

Mr. ARMEY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that the business

in order under the Calendar Wednesday rule be dispensed with on Wednesday next.

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

There was no objection.

REMOVAL OF NAME OF MEMBER AS COSPONSOR OF H.R. 2823

Mr. DEFAZIO. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to remove my name as cosponsor of H.R. 2823.

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

There was no objection.

SALUTING MR. TAUZIN'S EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF LOUISIANA MIS- SIONARY CHARLES SONGE

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

Mr. SCHAEFER. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the efforts of one of our distinguished colleagues, the gentleman from Louisiana [Mr. TAUZIN], in securing the release from Russia of Rev. Charles Songe, a Christian missionary from Houma, LA.

Mr. Songe was arrested in Russia last year on charges of violating currency laws. However, the nature of his case indicates the real reason behind his arrest was the Russian Government continuing to harass him. Due to the serious nature of these charges and the hostility shown to Mr. Songe by the Russian Government because of his religious activities, Mr. TAUZIN swung into action, appealing to the United States State Department and to Vice President GORE.

Mr. TAUZIN spearheaded a joint letter to Russian officials which I signed as well as others. These efforts were richly rewarded when a Russian judge imposed a suspended 3-year sentence.

I want to congratulate Mr. TAUZIN today for his fierce devotion to the principle of freedom of religion in this country, one of the cornerstones of it.

I would also like to say that this is just one way that we, as Members of Congress, can satisfactorily help many, many people who are constituents throughout the country.

Mr. Speaker, I include for the RECORD the following articles:

[From the Houma, LA Courier, Apr. 12, 1996]

THE BEGINNING OF THE END IS FINALLY HERE
FOR MISSIONARY

(By Dawn Crouch)

The Rev. Charles Songe is expected to return to Houma Sunday, ending a three-year odyssey that placed the Christian missionary at the center of cultural, religious and economic whirlwinds sweeping across Russia.

"He's on his way home," said Ken Johnson, a spokesman for U.S. Rep Billy Tauzin, R-
Chackbay.

Johnson said he talked to Songe this morning before the Houma missionary boarded a train to Moscow.

"He was ebullient," Johnson said. "Clearly, he seemed as if he'd seen an angel. He just said how excited he was for this long ordeal to be finally over and how important it was for him to be united with his family and friends. He said he loved his family so much and was thankful that all this worked out."

In May, the Houma missionary was arrested in the town of Saransk on charges that he paid for goods and services using American dollars rather than Russian rubles.

Last week, Russian Judge Tatyana Yelina imposed a suspended three-year prison sentence and permitted him to leave the country voluntarily. Songe, 38, had faced the prospect of spending the rest of his life in jail until U.S. officials, led by Tauzin, waged a complex diplomatic effort to secure his release and return.

A Russian bureaucrat had refused to grant Songe an exit visa earlier this week, posing a potential last-minute hitch that could prevent the missionary from returning home. But Songe received a letter this morning from Yelina, who assured bureaucrats the missionary's case had been resolved.

"She assured the bureaucrats that they would not be held liable for cutting him loose," Johnson said.

After receiving his visa, Songe went to Russian police, who returned the property they had seized from him, including a journal of financial transactions that was used as evidence against him.

Songe's train ride from Saransk will take about 12 hours. He plans to board a plane in Moscow at 7 a.m. Saturday, arriving in New York that night. After a brief stop in Atlanta, Songe is expected to arrive at New Orleans International Airport at 5:30 p.m. Sunday aboard Delta Airlines Flight 2063. An entourage of relatives, church members and friends is expected to greet him, including Tauzin, who plans to fly in from Washington.

"It's been an extraordinary odyssey filled with happiness, sadness, disappointing setbacks and some major successes," Johnson said this morning. "I guess there's something to be said for the power of prayer."

IN THE BEGINNING

It all began when Songe, his wife Tina and their three children, members of Living Word Church in Houma, bought plane tickets to Russia in June 1993. Less than two years before, the Soviet hammer and sickle had been taken down from the Kremlin, marking the end of communist domination.

Charles and Tina Songe said this historic time offered a unique opportunity to spread the word of God as they understood it, in a country where religious freedom had been repressed for decades. Songe recalled those intentions in a final plea before Judge Tatyana Yelina and the two-member jury that heard his case.

"We came here to bless the people with the word of God, not to cause trouble," Songe said he told the judge.

But trouble was what he found, much of it having less to do with his own circumstances than with the larger political and social upheaval swirling around him.

After the fall of the Soviet Union's Iron Curtain of secrecy and censorship, chaotic winds of new-found freedom raced like wildfire across Russia. The country held its first truly free elections. A free press actively reported news of the nation and the world as its members saw fit.

Free-market reforms transformed a state-controlled economy into privatized industries. Many failed shortly after springing to life. Russia's currency, the ruble, was no longer subsidized and lost much of its value.

For seven decades, the government had tried to root out religious spirit and replace it with an atheism that set humanity, not

God, as the master of its own destiny. One result of this new religious liberty was the opening of borders to foreign faiths for the first time since 1917.

The Songes arrived among many missionaries who flooded the Russian provinces, only too happy to do their part.

After reaching Moscow, the Songes traveled 200 miles southeast by train to Saransk, capital of the former Mordvinian Republic, now a region of Russia. The industrial town of 400,000, rooted in coal mining, sits on the banks of the Insar River in the Volga uplands. At first, the major and deputy mayor invited the Songes to locate in the town, and they quickly began their ministry.

But they were not as welcome as they thought. One of the most unwelcoming groups for Western missionaries is the Russian Orthodox Church, scholars say. The church had been the state religion under the czars prior to the rise of the Soviet Union, and its leaders longed to restore its pre-eminence in Russian society. Many Russian Orthodox church leaders in Saransk and throughout the country feel threatened by the increasing presence of Western missionaries, seeing them as religious and cultural competition.

The missionaries contend they are not trying to compete with Orthodox Church. Their following consisted mainly of young people, some of whom felt disconnected from the archaic language and rituals of Orthodox services.

LAYING A FOUNDATION

The Songes, working through an international missionary group called Global Strategies, built the Saransk Christian Center from the ground up. On weekends, the couple joined other missionaries, playing acoustic guitar and singing hymns on street corners.

As passersby stopped to listen, the Songes invited them to visit their small church for prayer and Bible discussions. Some accepted; others shunned the missionaries for their different religious beliefs. At its peak, the church had 150 members, but the number dropped by at least two-thirds as Songe's legal troubles dragged on.

On the night of last May 16, as the couple celebrated their 14th wedding anniversary, 11 Russian federal agents and two witnesses crowded at their apartment's front door, flashing a search warrant, the Songes said.

Through a translator, the agents demanded financial records and answers to questions. Items were confiscated, including the journal in which Tina had recorded all the family's purchases since arriving in Russia.

The next day, Charles Songe was arrested and charged with 74 counts of violating Russian currency laws. Each charge carries a maximum of 10 years in prison: 740 years total. The journal became a key piece of evidence in the legal proceedings that followed.

Russian media focused attention on the couple's plight, and Tina began to fear she would be charged as well. In July, the Songes' daughter, 13-year-old Heidi, required medical attention for a minor ailment and returned to Houma, where she remained with relatives. Tina and the Songes' two other children, Jonathan, 7, and Rene, 11, returned to Houma in August.

CHURCH AND STATE

Almost from the start, U.S. officials and members of Songe's church in Houma expressed grave concerns. Johnson suggested that Russian authorities might have singled Songe out because of his religious convictions.

"Our suspicions of religious persecution are fact, not fantasy," Johnson said in November. "Russian officials are flexing their muscles, showing other missionaries that