

TRIBUTE TO THE STUDENTS AND STAFF OF BECKEMEYER GRADE SCHOOL, HILLSBORO, ILLINOIS

HON. JOHN SHIMKUS

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, December 18, 2001

Mr. SHIMKUS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the students and staff of Beckemeyer Grade School in Hillsboro, Illinois, and the heartwarming project they undertook to bring comfort to the victims of the recent tragedies.

The attacks of September 11th were a horrible shock to everyone in the United States, but to none were they more devastating than to the victims and their families. American hearts went out to those who would now have to struggle on without the light and laughter of their loved ones who had died. The outpouring of support for these families was enormous, like a bright light of kindness that shone out through the darkness of the disaster. Money, well-wishes and prayers poured in from all across the nation.

Mr. Speaker, the students and staff of Beckemeyer Grade School were part of that outpouring. They purchased several thousand small, glass figurines, called Comfort Angels. These beautiful angels were meant to bring hope and well-wishes to all who viewed them. The people of Hillsboro, lead by their coordinator Pamela Hopper, then set an ambitious goal: to distribute an angel to the families of every victim of the tragedy.

They have come astonishingly close to that goal—thousands of Comfort Angels have been distributed to families all over the world. They have found their way to embassies, fire stations, Congressional offices, and homes in New York and Washington. Two thousand of them were distributed by the Salvation Army alone, at the Memorial for the Pentagon on October 11th. And the results have been equally amazing. Letters have poured into Hillsboro, filled with thanks and touching stories.

Mr. Speaker, I am convinced that the terrorists of September wished to divide and demoralize our country. Instead, in many ways they have energized us and brought us closer together. The amazing success of the people of Beckemeyer Grade School is a wonderful example of this—their faith and hard work has allowed them to make a difference in many lives, and they deserve my thanks and the thanks of these chambers.

COMMENDING THE CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILWAY HOLIDAY TRAIN

HON. JERROLD NADLER

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, December 18, 2001

Mr. NADLER. Mr. Speaker, this year, the Canadian Pacific Railway Holiday Train embarked on its third annual “journey of goodwill” to collect food throughout Canada and the United States for those most in need. The two previous drives have collected 18 tons of food, and have raised more than \$500,000 to combat hunger. On December 4th, one of the three trains traveling throughout the United

States and Canada embarked on its journey from the Fresh Pond Junction Rail Yard in Queens, New York. There, the Canadian Pacific Railway hosted a special ceremony honoring and remembering the heroes of September 11th.

I would like to sincerely thank the Canadian Pacific Railway for having one of their beautifully decorated trains originate in New York City. This was a tribute to the men and women who lost their lives in the September 11th tragedy, as well as a tribute to their families. The victims' families were invited to the ceremony, and Christmas trees were given to all of the families of the firefighters and police officers who were killed. In addition, Canadian Pacific Railway donated \$100,000 to the NYSE Fund for Fallen Heroes. This kindness and generosity is just the most recent example of Canadian Pacific Railway's long standing commitment to the people of New York.

I commend the Canadian Pacific Railway on their benevolent gestures towards the city of New York, and thank them for not only supporting the United States and our families in this time of tragedy, but also for continuing their plight to feed the hungry.

IN HONOR OF MARY LOU WEISS UPON HER RETIREMENT FROM HERMOSA BEACH SCHOOL BOARD

HON. JANE HARMAN

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, December 18, 2001

Ms. HARMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor a good friend, Mary Lou Weiss, who retires this month from the Hermosa Beach Unified School District Board of Trustees, on which she has served as Trustee for 16 years, including 6 tours as President.

In her capacity as a School Board Trustee, Mary Lou has been a strong advocate for Hermosa Beach children, helping to ensure they receive the best educational opportunities. Because of her knowledge and expertise, I asked her to serve on my Education Advisory Committee.

A long time resident of Hermosa Beach, Mary Lou has contributed to the community in so many other ways as well. She has served as an advisory member for the Hermosa Beach Chamber of Commerce, coached AYSO boys soccer, and served on the advisory board for the Hermosa Beach Education Foundation. For her active contributions, she was named 1989 Hermosa Beach Woman of the Year.

Of special interest, she has managed several local farmers' markets, making sure the vendors get the space they need and that the markets run smoothly. I have taken advantage of these markets many times—during my campaigns, the farmers' markets have always been a great way to reach a lot of people, and as a member of Congress, my staff and I often bring our office resources to the community by setting up our own booth. Mary Lou not only accommodates these important visits for me, but she is always thoughtful enough to provide flowers and to remember that I like Diet Coke.

Mary Lou also is a tremendous resource to my staff, always available to answer questions about policy, politics, or which vendor has the

best produce. My staff members over the years consider Mary Lou as an additional “mother.”

This year, Mary Lou chose not to run for another term as a School Board Trustee in order to apply her years of experience to a run for Hermosa Beach City Council. Although she was not successful in this endeavor, she once again demonstrated her leadership and commitment to the community through the classy way she ran her campaign,

I will miss Mary Lou on the School Board, but I know we will continue to work together to ensure that we do the best we can for the children of our community. I join the citizens of Hermosa Beach in wishing Mary Lou and her family well in their future endeavors.]

DO REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS THWART RELIGIOUS FREEDOM?

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, December 18, 2001

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, the “Helsinki” Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe recently convened a briefing which examined the policies of various governments which require registration of religious groups and the effect of such policies on the freedom of religious belief and practice. There was evidence that such requirements can be, and often are, a threat to religious freedom among countries in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

As Co-Chairman of the Helsinki Commission, mandated to monitor and encourage compliance with the Helsinki Final Act and other OSCE commitments, I have become alarmed over the past decade by the creation of new laws and regulations in some OSCE countries that serve as a roadblock to the free exercise of religious belief. These actions have not been limited to emerging democracies, but include Western European countries such as Austria.

Many of these laws are crafted with the intent to repress religious communities deemed nefarious and dangerous to public safety. One cannot deny that certain groups have hidden behind the veil of religion in perpetrating monstrous and perfidious acts. The September 11th tragedies have been a grim reminder of that. Yet, while history does hold examples of religion employed as a tool for evil, these are exceptions and not the rule. In our own country, during the Civil Rights Movement, religious communities were the driving force in the effort to overturn the immoral “separate but equal” laws and provide legal protections. If strict religious registration laws had existed in this country, government officials could have clamped down on this just movement, possibly delaying long overdue reform.

While OSCE commitments do not forbid basic registration of religious groups, governments often use the pretext of “state security” to quell groups espousing views contrary to the ruling powers’ party line.

Registration laws are often designed on the premise that minority faiths are inimical to governmental goals. Proponents of more strenuous provisions cite crimes committed by individuals in justifying stringent registration requirements against religious groups, ignoring

the fact that criminal laws should be adequate to combat criminal activity. In other situations, some governments have crafted special church-state agreements, or concordats, which exclusively give one religious group powers and rights not available to other communities. By creating tiers or hierarchies, governments run the risk of dispersing privileges and authority in an inequitable fashion, ensuring that other religious groups will never exist on a level playing field, if at all. In a worst case scenario, by officially recognizing "traditional" or "historic" communities, governments can reflect an ambivalence towards minority religious groups. Such ambivalence can, in turn, create an atmosphere in which hostility or violence is perpetrated with impunity. The persistent brutality against Jehovah's Witnesses and evangelical groups in Georgia is an example of State authorities' failure to bring to justice the perpetrators of such violence.

Mr. Speaker, religious registration laws do not operate in a vacuum; other rights, such as freedom of association or freedom of speech, are often enveloped by these provisions. Clamping down on a group's ability to exist not only contravenes numerous, long-standing OSCE commitments, but can effectively remove from society forces that operate for the general welfare. The recent liquidation of the Salvation Army in Moscow is a lucid example. Who will suffer most? The poor and hungry who now benefit from the Salvation Army's ministries of mercy.

Each OSCE participating State has committed to full compliance with the provisions enumerated in the various Helsinki documents. The Bush Administration's commitment to religious freedom has been clearly articulated. In a March 9, 2001 letter, Dr. Condoleezza Rice, National Security Advisor, wrote: "President Bush is deeply committed to promoting the right of individuals around the world to practice freely their religious beliefs." She also expressed her concern about religious discrimination. In a separate letter on March 30th of this year, Vice President DICK CHENEY echoed this commitment when he referred to the promotion of religious freedom as "a defining element of the American character." He went on to declare the Bush Administration's commitment "to advancing the protection of individual religious freedom as an integral part of our foreign policy agenda."

Since the war on terrorism was declared, the President has made clear the distinction between acts of terrorism and religious practice. In his address to the country, Mr. Bush stated: "The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends. . . . Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists and every government that supports them." He further stated, "The terrorists are traitors to their own faith, trying, in effect, to hijack Islam itself." Accordingly, I believe this administration will not stray from supporting religious freedom during this challenging time.

Out of concern about recent developments and trends in the OSCE region, the Helsinki Commission conducted this briefing to discuss registration roadblocks affecting religious freedom. I was pleased by the panel of experts and practitioners assembled who were kind enough to travel from Europe to share their thoughts and insights, including Dr. Sophie van Bijsterveld, a professor of law in The Netherlands and current Co-Chair of the OSCE Advisory Panel of Experts on Freedom

of Religion or Belief, Dr. Gerhard Robbers, a member of the OSCE Advisory Panel of Experts and professor of law in Germany; Mr. Vassilios Tsirbas, interim executive director and senior legal counsel for the European Centre for Law and Justice in Strasbourg; and Col. Kenneth Baillie, commanding officer for the Salvation Army in Eastern Europe.

Dr. van Bijsterveld made the point that "the assessment of registration from the point of view of religious liberty depends entirely on the function that registration fulfills in the legal system, and the consequences that are attached to registration."

She continued: "A requirement of registration of religious groups as a pre-condition for the lawful exercise of religious freedom is worrisome in the light of international human rights standards. [Needing the government's] permission for a person to exercise his religion in community with others is, indeed, problematic in the light of internationally acknowledged religious liberty standards. Religious liberty should not be made dependent on a prior government clearance. This touches the very essence of religious liberty."

Dr. Robbers noted that registration of religious communities is often a requirement but "it need not be a roadblock to religious freedom. In fact, it can free the way to more positive religious freedom if correctly performed." If utilized, "registration and registration procedures must meet certain standards. Registration must be based on equal treatment of all religious communities. . . . [and] the process of registration must follow due process of law." He further noted that "religious activity in and as community, must be possible even without being registered as religious community." He made clear that the minimum number of members required for registration need not be too many and there should be no minimum period of existence before registration is allowed.

The third panelist, Mr. Tsirbas, opined, "Within this proliferation of the field of human rights, the Helsinki Final Act is a more than promising note. The commitment to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief for all, without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion, basically summarizes the . . . protection of international and domestic legal documents. Religious liberty stands out as one of those *sine qua non* conditions for an atmosphere of respect for the rights of individuals or whole communities."

Mr. Tsirbas also stated, "If the protection of the individual is considered the cornerstone of our modern legal system, religious freedom should be considered the cornerstone of all other rights. The right itself is one of the most recent to be recognized and protected, yet it embraces and reflects the inevitable outworking through the course of time of the fundamental truths of belief in the worth of a person."

Lastly, Col. Kenneth Baillie, spokesman for the Salvation Army in Eastern Europe, outlined the experience of registering his organization in Moscow. "In Russia, as of February this year, we are registered nationwide as a centralized religious organization, [however] the city of Moscow is another story. We have been registered as a religious group in Moscow since 1992. In response to the 1997 law, like everyone else, we applied for re-registra-

tion, thinking that it would be merely pro forma. Our application documents were submitted, and a staff person in the city Ministry of Justice said everything was in order, we would have our signed and stamped registration in two days.

"Two days later," Col. Baillie continued, "the same staffer called to say, in a sheepish voice, 'There's a problem.' Well, it is now three years later, and there is still a problem. Someone took an ideological decision to deny us, that is absolutely clear to me, and three years of meetings and documents and media statements and legal briefs are all window-dressing. Behind it all is an arbitrary, discriminatory, and secret decision, and to this day I do not know who made the decision, or why."

Based on the difficult experience of trying to register in Moscow and the Salvation Army's subsequent "liquidation" by a Moscow court, Col. Baillie offered some observations. He noted how "the law's ambiguity gives public officials the power to invent arbitrary constructions of the law." Col. Baillie concluded by stating, "We will not give up," but added he is "understandably skeptical about religious registration law, and particularly the will to uphold what the law says in regard to religious freedom."

Mr. Speaker, this Helsinki Commission briefing offered a clear picture of how the law and practice affecting registration of religious groups have become critical aspects in the defense of the right to freedom of conscience, religion or belief. No doubt registration requirements can serve as a roadblock which is detrimental to religious freedom. The Commission will continue to monitor this trend among the region's governments which are instituting more stringent registration requirements and will encourage full compliance with the Helsinki commitments to ensure the protection of this fundamental right.

TO RECOGNIZE THE ARGYRO LALOS SCHOLARSHIP FUND AT ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY, AND THE OUTSTANDING CITIZEN IT HONORS

HON. ED PASTOR
OF ARIZONA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, December 18, 2001

Mr. PASTOR. Mr. Speaker, I stand before you today to recognize the Argyro Lalos Scholarship Fund at Arizona State University (ASU), and the outstanding citizen it honors, Ms. Argyro Lalos of Phoenix, Arizona.

Recently, the Lalos family, with the help of 20 contributors, endowed a scholarship fund on behalf of 93-year-old Yia Yia (ya-ya, which is "grandmother" in Greek), as she is affectionately known, to honor her lifelong respect for quality education. Each year, Ms. Lalos will help select a recipient of the award, which is in the amount of \$500, from among the engineering students at ASU that apply. Engineering students are the focus because the Lalos family believes that Yia Yia would have excelled in this field had she been given the opportunity. Applicants are judged on academic standing and essays they write explaining obstacles they have overcome in achieving a higher education.

Her desire to learn was prominent at an early age. Raised in Greece, she was pulled