

which Kazakhstan is a participating State, and other international organizations which promote democratization.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, to round out a very depressing picture, Kazakhstan's parliament is reportedly working towards the adoption of amendments to the law on religion that will severely limit freedom of conscience. The draft provisions would require at least 50 members for a religious association to be registered (the law currently requires 10). In order to engage in "missionary activity," which would involve merely sharing religious beliefs with others, individuals—citizens or not—would have to be registered with the government, and religious activity would be permitted only at the site of a religious organization, which could bar meetings in rented facilities or even private homes. Violation of these provisions could lead to a sentence of one-year in prison or even two years of "corrective labor," and to the closing of religious organizations.

These draft amendments to the religion law were introduced in Kazakhstan's parliament in early April. According to the U.S. Embassy in Almaty, no date has been scheduled for discussion of the legislation though it is expected the measure will be considered before the current session ends in June. The U.S. Government, the OSCE, and other international agencies have expressed concern about the possible restriction of religious liberty, and there is reason to fear the worst.

In recent months, the attitude underlying these draft amendments has already had a real impact on believers. American citizens who did humanitarian work in several cities in Kazakhstan have been harassed, intimidated and eventually deported. The formal cause of their expulsion was violation of administrative regulations but one official told an American the real reason was because they were Christians. In one particularly brutal, ugly case, Americans who had been told to leave the country were preparing to do so when the authorities brought them back from the airport so they could be videotaped for TV broadcasts portraying them as engaging in various sorts of subversive activities. An American family preparing to leave Ust-Kamenorgorsk was harassed by a Kazakh security official who threatened to spend the entire night in their tiny apartment to make sure they left. It took several hours before he could be persuaded to leave, despite the fact that his presence was frightening a pregnant American woman.

Jehovah's Witnesses have also reported stepped-up harassment and intimidation. Over the past few months, central and local media have been attacking Jehovah's Witnesses, who are depicted as religious extremists. In one bizarre case, according to the Witnesses, a television station broadcast video footage of Islamic terrorists, who were described as Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as footage of a police raid on a meeting held in a private home.

Kazakhstan's new Administrative Violation Code, which went into effect in February, allows the suspension or prohibition of religious organizations for evading registration or for violating assembly rules. This has already been used to suspend the activity of a group of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kyzyl-Orda. A similar case is pending in Taraz.

Just today, May 16, Keston News Service reports that authorities have declared a Baptist church in the town of Kulsary (Atyrau region) illegal and ordered it to stop all meetings,

claiming that it may not function until it is registered. In fact, Kazakh law does not ban activity by religious communities without registration, but the regional prosecutor upheld the ban. Church leaders intend to appeal the decision, but local lawyers are afraid to take such a case.

Keston further reports that on April 10, the authorities in Kyzylorda fined a Baptist church 7,750 tenge (about \$53) and suspended its activities until it obtains registration. In February, police had raided a Kazakh-language service at that church, demanding that participants show their identity documents and write statements about the gathering. They confiscated religious writings in Kazakh and Russian, and took five people, including the leader of the service, Erlan Sarsenbaev, to the police station. According to the Baptists, the police told them "During the Soviet times, believers like you were shot. Now you are feeling at peace, but we will show you." When Sarsenbaev refused to write a statement, police officers "began to hit him on his neck, abdomen and head with a plastic bottle filled with water." Finally, they forged his signature, and wrote the statement on his behalf.

As President Bush recently said, "the newly independent republics of Central Asia impose troubling limits on religious expression and missionary work." This trend in Kazakhstan is especially disturbing because despite the consistent consolidation of presidential power and general crackdown on opposition and dissent, relative religious freedom had been one of the bright spots. It seems this bright spot is about to disappear.

Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago, Erlan Idrisov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, visited Washington. In his public speaking engagements, he focused on Kazakhstan's emphasis on stability and its desire for good relations with its neighbors. These are understandable priorities which the United States has every reason to support. But Minister Idrisov simply discounted charges of human rights problems, arguing on May 2 at the Carnegie Endowment that the above-mentioned Washington Post editorial is "not the final word" on the human rights situation in his country.

Minister Idrisov may disagree with any Washington Post editorial, if he likes. But when you consider many other sources, such as the State Department's report on human rights practices, the Committee to Protect Journalists (which last year named President Nazarbaev one of the world's ten worst enemies of the media), and the OSCE Center in Almaty, the overall impression is clear and indisputable. Despite official Kazakh claims about progress, the human rights situation is poor and threatens to get worse. If President Nazarbaev wants to change that impression and convince people that he is sincere about wanting to democratize his country, he must take concrete steps to do so. The time is long past when we could take his assurances at face value.

RECOGNIZING VERNA IRENE SWOBODA

HON. SAM GRAVES

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 16, 2001

Mr. GRAVES. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Verna Irene Swoboda, a lifelong resident of St. Joseph, Missouri, who is celebrating her 90th birthday, today, May 16, 2001. She was born in St. Joseph in 1911, the only daughter of Thomas and Vera Moore, along with her four brothers, Joseph, Wilbur, Norman, and Mason. She was married to her late husband, Ralph J. Swoboda, for 61 years.

Verna's four children, Rachel, Tom, Vera, and Gloria are hosting a birthday celebration for her on May 26th at the home of her daughter, Rachel, in St. Joseph. It is expected that her entire family, including nine grandchildren and eight great grandchildren will attend, many coming from out of state. Also, her many friends in the senior residence where she lives in her own apartment plan to celebrate with her on May 16th.

Verna enjoys good health and is very active with her family, her church, her friends, and her hobbies. She still enjoys painting, writing poetry, reading good books, and working on her scrapbooks and picture albums. She is a very spunky lady with a very sharp wit and is adored by all who know her. She can tell a very good story and has always been proud of her Irish heritage, and she is especially proud of her hometown of St. Joseph.

Again, I want to wish Verna Irene Swoboda all the very best on her 90th birthday.

THE STATE AND LOCAL CANDIDATE FAIRNESS ACT

HON. F. JAMES SENSENBRENNER, JR.

OF WISCONSIN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 16, 2001

Mr. SENSENBRENNER. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing legislation to extend to the principal campaign committee of state and local candidates for elective public office the same graduated tax rates which apply to the principal campaign committee of a candidate for Congress.

In running for Congress, Members of the House are made aware of the Section 527 tax laws that apply to congressional campaign committees. What many Members of Congress may not be aware of is the unfair tax treatment of campaign committees for state and local candidates. Recently, state representatives from my home state of Wisconsin brought to my attention the burdensome tax laws involving the graduated tax rates applicable to interest bearing accounts for state and local campaign committees. Under current law, the tax rate applied to the interest earned by a campaign committee is determined by which office the candidate seeks. State and local candidates are forced to pay a 35% tax rate while congressional candidates pay only 15% on interest bearing accounts for their primary campaign committees.

That is why I am introducing the State and Local Candidate Fairness Act. This legislation would allow state and local candidates to pay

the same tax rate as congressional candidates on interest bearing accounts for their campaign committees.

As we are asking our state and local officials to build better and safer communities, we should be encouraging more involvement from our citizens and not discouraging them from participating in state or local government.

By addressing unfair tax burdens on state candidates, my legislation would also help to simplify the tax code. By making the tax rates the same for state and local candidates as they are for congressional candidates, the tax code will in a small way become simpler for everyone running for office. I urge my colleagues to support this legislation to fight against unfair tax rates for candidates for state and local office.

TRIBUTE TO DR. JOHN HORN

HON. PETE SESSIONS

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 16, 2001

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize today an outstanding educator from my district, Dr. John Horn. At the end of this school year, Dr. Horn will retire as Superintendent of the Mesquite Independent School District, bringing his long and distinguished career to a close.

During his 38-year career, Dr. Horn has been a visionary in public education, receiving numerous awards for his service. In 1995, he was honored as the Texas Superintendent of the Year by the Texas Association of School Administrators. The Mesquite ISD, with over 32,000 students, has thrived under his leadership, most recently earning the "Recognized" rating from the Texas Education Agency in 2000.

Dr. Horn involves the entire community in the improvement of education and involves himself in the community through various civic organizations. Often referred to as the "superintendent's superintendent," Dr. Horn has thoroughly dedicated himself to the education and enrichment of his students.

Although he be will greatly missed, Dr. Horn's legacy will serve as a constant reminder of his extraordinary career. I ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating Dr. John Horn on all of his accomplishments and wishing him the best for his well-deserved retirement.

THE TREND OF PRIVATIZATION

HON. TED STRICKLAND

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 16, 2001

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, I want to address a trend that I find very disturbing; a trend that I encounter again and again across a spectrum of seemingly unrelated issues. It is the trend of privatization, the trend of government forfeiting its responsibilities to those it serves.

I believe strongly that certain societal functions are so important that they simply must be carried out by the government, namely the imprisonment of criminals and the maintenance

of a health care safety net for our most vulnerable citizens. Now, I realize that these two functions are extremely divergent, but both are vitally important to society. The purpose of imprisonment is to protect the public from dangerous individuals who are paying a debt to society, and the purpose of the public health safety net is to protect the public, particularly the poor, from the ravages of preventable and treatable disease.

These two public functions have one very important thing in common: once we privatize them and turn over their missions to profit-making entities, we will never be able to rebuild what we have lost.

Public hospitals and public health centers provide a vital service as part of our national health care delivery system; they provide care to those who would be turned away from other institutions for not having health insurance. They often serve the poorest and the sickest populations, and are particularly attuned to the health consequences of delayed care, poverty, poor nutrition and chronic disease. Because these institutions are directly accountable to the public, they serve the public well—better, I would argue, than a privatized counterpart. I am not saying that private hospitals are not important or that they do not provide their share of uncompensated care, because they do, and we need to have them around. I am saying that public health care providers play a very important role in the health care marketplace, and they are unique in that they are more directly accountable to the public than are their private counterparts. More important, once we break our commitment to providing public health care by privatizing this service, we will find it very difficult, if not impossible, to re-establish this vital component of our comprehensive health care delivery system. I fear that we are moving toward this unfortunate state of affairs right now in our nation's capitol with the proposed privatization of DC General Hospital. Mr. Speaker, I believe that the plan to privatize DC General is, like most privatization plans, an extremely shortsighted measure that will jeopardize the availability of quality health care for some of the city's poorest citizens.

Likewise, the privatization of our nation's prisons is a practice that I find equally repugnant. The need to make a profit creates an incentive for private prison companies to cut corners when it comes to the security of the facility and the quality of correction personnel. The result is understaffing, low wages, inadequate training, poor benefits, and difficult working conditions. Reports from various private facilities reveal a failure to fill staff positions, a failure to provide government mandated programs that involve proper correctional officer training and prisoner rehabilitation programs, and a failure to implement tested, comprehensive security measures. Additionally, when governments contract out with private prison operators, taxpayers lose much in the way of valuable oversight tools. Nevertheless, they are still forced to assume much of the financial and legal liability associated with the operation of private prisons. If there are riots or breakouts, local government authorities are called in to handle the situation. When a private prison official violates an inmates rights, the taxpayers from the community—not the prison corporation—foot the bill for the lawsuit.

Whether it's the security of our prison system or the health care of America's poorest

citizens, privatization is a risky business that could cost us dearly down the road. I hope that the Congress will take very seriously its responsibility to the American public and not continue efforts to privatize safety net health care providers or the nation's prison system.

TRIBUTE TO THE LATE MARGARET VILLAGRAN (SIERRA) MELENDEZ

HON. JOE BACA

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 16, 2001

Mr. BACA. Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that I note the passing of Margaret Villagran (Sierra) Melendez, the mother of Ruby Ramirez on my staff.

Margaret was born to Milton Villagran & Juanita Palacios on June 10, 1910 in El Paso, Texas. She was the 15th child of a family of 17. Her father was employed for Santa Fe until he died in 1917. Her mother was a housewife for the most part, and followed her husband wherever he was sent. She did the laundry for the work crews at the different sites that they were assigned to.

Margaret came to California at the age of 10 with her sister who was 17. Her brothers were working at the Jurupa Quarry in South Fontana and her sister came to work as a housekeeper for one of the owners of a winery in Guasti. They had to leave their mother behind until they had enough money to relocate them to California which was about two years later. She attended an elementary school named "Wineville" later changed to Guasti.

Margaret dropped out of school at 14 and went to live with her brother, Albert Villagran in Orange, CA. She was bilingual and went to work for Woolworths as a sales girl. Later she worked at the Hunts Co. and Sunkist Packing House. She came back to Fontana when she was 18 and met her husband, Pete Sierra. They got married and moved to Colton in 1927. They bought a house at 965 Jefferson Lane and she lived there until she was hospitalized.

Tragically, her first husband was killed in 1956 by a drunk driver. She was a widow for 19 years and then she remarried Frank Melendez in 1977. Frank and Margaret had dated before she married Pete. 32 years later, they met and got married. He died in 1999.

Margaret was a loving caring mother to everyone. Everyone that came to her house was welcome and the first thing she did was feed them. She was active in the Heart Association and once a year took care of collecting funds for the Heart Foundation. She volunteered for the Cancer Association, VFW, PTA, and was a member of San Salvador Catholic Church. She liked to work in her garden and cook on her wooden stove whenever she had a chance. Her house was a regular soup kitchen. Her house was located between the Union Pacific and the Southern Pacific Railroads. Every person that got off the train came knocking on her door and they never went away hungry.

Margaret never missed an election. She made sure that she had her absentee ballot. She was a good listener, helped wherever she was needed and never complained even with all the hardships she encountered throughout