

Bus trips should not turn into tragedies, and that is why today we are again introducing the Motorcoach Enhanced Safety Act of 2009. We need these new standards now to ensure the safety of every rider and driver on the road.

In 2007, the American Bus Association reported that over 750 million passenger trips covering more than 60 billion miles were made by motorcoaches in the United States.

More and more people are choosing buses for their transportation, and it seems every week you read about another serious motorcoach accident . . . the crash involving a minor-league hockey team from Albany, New York; the fatal motorcoach accidents in Texas; the tour bus crash in Arizona that killed 7 passengers. The number of serious accidents and tragic deaths will only grow if we do not take action.

Our legislation directs the Secretary of the Department of Transportation to implement numerous safety regulations already recommended by the National Transportation Safety Board. Incredibly, many of these recommendations—including seatbelts, fire extinguishers, increased driver training, and stronger windows—have languished for years.

Our bill places firm timelines on the development and implementation of these rules and does so in a manner consistent with the recommendations of the National Transportation Safety Board—the guardian of our Nation's travel safety.

This includes safety belts and stronger seating systems to ensure occupants stay in their seats in a crash.

Stronger and better glazing on windows to prevent passengers from being easily ejected out of the motorcoach, crush-resistant roofs that can better withstand rollovers, improved protection against fires by reducing flammability of the motorcoach interior, and better training for operators in the case of fire.

John Betts' son David was a second baseman on the Bluffton baseball team and was on the bus when it crashed in Atlanta 2 years ago. Mr. Betts lost his son in that tragic accident, but has since been a tireless advocate for motorcoach safety reform.

In testimony before the Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine Infrastructure, Safety, and Security, Mr. Betts said:

Motorcoach transportation may be one of the safest modes when you look at statistics of lives lost per miles traveled compared to other modes of transportation. However, as family members here today representing those who had a loved one die in such a crash, our first response is that such statistics are not comforting. As a father, am I to disregard David's death as his being one of the unlucky few? As NTSB recommendations languish here in the United States, Europe and Australia have already required basic occupant safety protection measures such as seat belts.

Mr. Betts eloquent words challenge Congress to take action so that other

Americans do not tragically, needlessly, lose their lives, and it is my hope that we will swiftly pass this long overdue bill.

SUBMITTED RESOLUTIONS

SENATE RESOLUTION 69—DESIGNATING MARCH 2009 AS “NATIONAL READING MONTH” AND AUTHORIZING THE COLLECTION OF NONMONETARY BOOK DONATIONS IN SENATE OFFICE BUILDINGS DURING THE PERIOD BEGINNING MARCH 9, 2009 AND ENDING MARCH 27, 2009 FROM SENATORS AND OFFICERS AND EMPLOYEES OF THE SENATE TO ASSIST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THE WASHINGTON, D.C. METROPOLITAN AREA

Mr. LAUTENBERG (for himself, Mr. LEVIN, Mr. HARKIN, Mr. KENNEDY, Mr. REED, Mr. COCHRAN, Ms. SNOWE, Mr. KERRY, and Mr. JOHNSON) submitted the following resolution; which was considered and agreed to:

S. RES. 69

Whereas literacy is a learned skill that is improved through practice and regular reading;

Whereas public and school libraries play an important role in helping children learn to read and gain critical information literacy skills by providing easy and free access to books and other information on a wide range of topics;

Whereas the reading of books with children improves children's language, cognitive, and literacy skills;

Whereas research demonstrates that reading aloud with children is the single most important activity for helping them become successful readers;

Whereas quality children's books and the continued efforts of educators, parents, and volunteer reading partners can instill a love of reading that will last a lifetime;

Whereas school reading programs provide students with a chance to improve their reading skills and take pleasure in stories;

Whereas such programs have a profound and lasting positive impact on a child's life through improved reading comprehension, motivation, and achievement, as well as improved overall academic performance, classroom behavior, self-confidence, and social skills; and

Whereas all people of the United States can help celebrate the importance of reading by donating children's books, volunteering to read to and mentor young students, and supporting public policies aimed at improving literacy rates: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, Notwithstanding any other rules and regulations of the Senate—

(1) the Senate designates March 2009 as “National Reading Month”;

(2) a Senator or officer or employee of the Senate may solicit another Senator or officer or employee of the Senate within Senate buildings for nonmonetary book donations during the period beginning March 9, 2009 and ending March 27, 2009 to assist elementary school students in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, if such solicitation does not otherwise violate any rule or regulation of the Senate or any Federal law; and

(3) a Senator or officer or employee of the Senate may work with a nonprofit organization with respect to the delivery of donations described in paragraph (2).

SENATE RESOLUTION 70—CONGRATULATING THE PEOPLE OF THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA ON THE 1000TH ANNIVERSARY OF LITHUANIA AND CELEBRATING THE RICH HISTORY OF LITHUANIA

Mr. DURBIN (for himself, Mr. VOINOVICH, and Mrs. FEINSTEIN) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations:

S. RES. 70

Whereas the name “Lithuania” first appeared in European records in the year 1009, when it was mentioned in the German manuscript “Annals of Quedlinburg”;

Whereas Duke Mindaugas united various Baltic tribes and established the state of Lithuania during the period between 1236 and 1263;

Whereas, by the end of the 14th century, Lithuania was the largest country in Europe, encompassing territory from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea;

Whereas Vilnius University was founded in 1579 and remained the easternmost university in Europe for 200 years;

Whereas the February 16, 1918, Act of Independence of Lithuania led to the establishment of Lithuania as a sovereign and democratic state;

Whereas, under the cover of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, on June 17, 1940, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania were forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union in violation of pre-existing peace treaties;

Whereas, during 50 years of Soviet occupation of the Baltic states, Congress strongly, consistently, and on a bipartisan basis refused to legally recognize the incorporation of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania by the Soviet Union;

Whereas, on March 11, 1990, the Republic of Lithuania was restored and Lithuania became the first Soviet republic to declare independence;

Whereas on September 2, 1991, the United States Government formally recognized Lithuania as an independent and sovereign nation;

Whereas Lithuania has successfully developed into a free and democratic country, with a free market economy and respect for the rule of law;

Whereas Lithuania is a full and responsible member of the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the European Union, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization;

Whereas, in 2007, the United States Government and the Government of Lithuania celebrated 85 years of continuous diplomatic relations;

Whereas the United States Government welcomes and appreciates efforts by the Government of Lithuania to maintain international peace and stability in Europe and around the world by contributing to international civilian and military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Georgia; and

Whereas Lithuania is a strong and loyal ally of the United States, and the people of Lithuania share common values with the people of the United States: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) congratulates the people of the Republic of Lithuania on the occasion of the 1000th anniversary of Lithuania;

(2) commends the Government of Lithuania for its success in implementing political and economic reforms, for establishing political, religious and economic freedom,

and for its commitment to human rights; and

(3) recognizes the close and enduring relationship between the United States Government and the Government of Lithuania.

SENATE RESOLUTION 71—CONDEMNING THE GOVERNMENT OF IRAN FOR ITS STATE-SPONSORED PERSECUTION OF THE BAHAI MINORITY IN IRAN AND ITS CONTINUED VIOLATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. WYDEN (for himself, Mr. MENENDEZ, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, Ms. SNOWE, and Mr. BROWNBACK) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations:

S. RES. 71

Whereas, in 1982, 1984, 1988, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1996, 2000, 2006, and 2008, Congress declared that it deplored the religious persecution by the Government of Iran of the Baha'i community and would hold the Government of Iran responsible for upholding the rights of all Iranian nationals, including members of the Baha'i faith;

Whereas, in November 2007, the Iranian Ministry of Information in Shiraz jailed Baha'is Ms. Raha Sabet, age 33, Mr. Sasan Taqva, age 32, and Ms. Haleh Roohi, age 29, for educating underprivileged children and gave them 4-year prison terms, which they are serving;

Whereas Ms. Sabet, Mr. Taqva, and Ms. Roohi were targeted solely on the basis of their religion;

Whereas, on January 23, 2008, the Department of State released a statement urging the Government of Iran to release all individuals held without due process and a fair trial, including the 3 young Baha'is being held in an Iranian Ministry of Intelligence detention center in Shiraz;

Whereas, in March and May of 2008, Iranian intelligence officials in Mashhad and Tehran arrested and imprisoned Mrs. Fariba Kamalabadi, Mr. Jamaloddin Khanjani, Mr. Afif Naeimi, Mr. Saeid Rezaie, Mr. Behrouz Tavakkoli, Mrs. Mahvash Sabet, and Mr. Vahid Tizfahm, the members of the coordinating group for the Baha'i community in Iran;

Whereas, on February 11, 2009, the deputy prosecutor in Tehran, Mr. Hassan Haddad, announced that those seven leaders will go on trial at a Revolutionary Court on charges of "espionage for Israel, insulting religious sanctities and propaganda against the Islamic Republic";

Whereas the lawyer for these seven leaders, Mrs. Shirin Ebadi, the Nobel Laureate, has been denied all access to the prisoners and their files;

Whereas these seven Baha'i leaders were targeted solely on the basis of their religion; and

Whereas the Government of Iran is party to the International Covenants on Human Rights: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) condemns the Government of Iran for its state-sponsored persecution of the Baha'i minority in Iran and its continued violation of the International Covenants on Human Rights;

(2) calls on the Government of Iran to immediately release the seven leaders and all other prisoners held solely on account of their religion, including Mrs. Fariba Kamalabadi, Mr. Jamaloddin Khanjani, Mr. Afif Naeimi, Mr. Saeid Rezaie, Mr. Behrouz

Tavakkoli, Mrs. Mahvash Sabet, Mr. Vahid Tizfahm, Ms. Raha Sabet, Mr. Sasan Taqva, and Ms. Haleh Roohi; and

(3) calls on the President and Secretary of State, in cooperation with the international community, to immediately condemn the Government of Iran's continued violation of human rights and demand the immediate release of prisoners held solely on account of their religion, including Mrs. Fariba Kamalabadi, Mr. Jamaloddin Khanjani, Mr. Afif Naeimi, Mr. Saeid Rezaie, Mr. Behrouz Tavakkoli, Mrs. Mahvash Sabet, Mr. Vahid Tizfahm, Ms. Raha Sabet, Mr. Sasan Taqva, and Ms. Haleh Roohi.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I rise today to speak in support of a resolution that I am offering with my colleagues, Senators BROWNBACK, MENENDEZ, SNOWE, and WHITEHOUSE. This resolution condemns the Iranian government's persecution of its own Baha'i community and urges the Obama administration to speak out strongly against this continued injustice.

The Baha'i Faith, the world's youngest independent monotheistic religion, was founded in Iran in 1844. Today, it is practiced by more than 5 million people across the planet, from Bangalore, India to Beaverton, Oregon. Roughly 300,000 of these adherents still live in Iran. Although Baha'i teachings emphasize equality, unity, and peace, Iranian authorities have viewed the religion as an apostasy and have treated it as a threat since the beginning.

The current Islamic Republic has been particularly hostile to Baha'i practitioners since its establishment in 1979. In 1983, Iran's government formally banned all Baha'i religious institutions and criminalized membership in them and service to them. The regime has officially recognized Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians as religious minorities. It refuses to extend this same status to the Baha'is, even though they make up Iran's largest religious minority. According to the State Department's 2008 International Religious Freedom Report, the regime continues to create "a threatening atmosphere for nearly all non-Shi'a religious groups, most notably for Baha'is." The government routinely seizes personal property from members of the Baha'i community, denies access to education and employment opportunities, and detains Baha'is based solely on their religious beliefs.

Last year, the Iranian regime imprisoned seven leaders of the Baha'i community. In February 2009, Tehran's deputy prosecutor announced that these seven leaders would be tried on charges of "espionage for Israel, insulting religious sanctities, and propaganda against the Islamic Republic." Not surprisingly, the regime provided no evidence to support these preposterous accusations and has refused to allow a lawyer for the seven to even meet with them. These actions are clear and unambiguous violations of Iran's international commitments under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Some in the international community have already condemned this mockery of justice,

and rightly so. My colleagues and I believe the time has now come to add the United States Senate to this growing chorus of voices.

Our resolution is simple and straightforward. It denounces the Iranian government's persecution of the Baha'is and calls on the regime to immediately release all prisoners held for their religious beliefs, including the seven Baha'i leaders. It further calls on President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to work with the international community in condemning the Iranian regime for its repeated human rights violations.

I hope that colleagues will join me and Senators BROWNBACK, MENENDEZ, SNOWE, and WHITEHOUSE in supporting this commonsense resolution.

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 10—CONGRATULATING THE SAILORS OF THE UNITED STATES SUBMARINE FORCE UPON THE COMPLETION OF 1,000 OHIO-CLASS BALLISTIC MISSILE SUBMARINE (SSBN) DETERRENT PATROLS

Ms. CANTWELL (for herself, Mrs. MURRAY, Mr. CHAMBLISS, Mr. ISAKSON, Mr. LUGAR, and Mr. DODD) submitted the following concurrent resolution; which was considered and agreed to:

S. CON. RES. 10

Whereas the Sailors of the United States Submarine Force recently completed the 1,000th deterrent patrol of the Ohio-class ballistic missile submarine (SSBN);

Whereas this milestone is significant for the Submarine Force, its crews and their families, the United States Navy, and the entire country;

Whereas this milestone was reached through the combined efforts and impressive achievements of all of the submariners who have participated in such patrols since the first patrol of USS Ohio (SSBN 726) in 1982;

Whereas, as a result of the dedication and commitment to excellence of the Sailors of the United States Submarine Force, ballistic missile submarines have always been ready and vigilant, reassuring United States allies and deterring anyone who might seek to do harm to the United States or United States allies;

Whereas the national maritime strategy of the United States recognizes the critical need for strategic deterrence in today's uncertain world;

Whereas the true strength of the ballistic missile submarine lies in the extremely talented and motivated Sailors who have voluntarily chosen to serve in the submarine community; and

Whereas the inherent stealth, unparalleled firepower, and nearly limitless endurance of the ballistic missile submarine provide a credible deterrence for any enemies that would seek to use force against the United States or United States allies: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate (the House of Representatives concurring), That Congress—

(1) congratulates the Sailors of the United States Submarine Force upon the completion of 1,000 Ohio-class ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) deterrent patrols; and

(2) honors and thanks the crews of ballistic missile submarines and their devoted families for their continued dedication and sacrifice.