

fill a quarter of slots for the incoming class from the expanded pool of qualified, geographically-diverse applicants received through the congressional nominations process. Then, in each subsequent academic year, half of the slots in each incoming class would have to be filled through the congressional nominations process.

My legislation will not require the Coast Guard to lower its student selection criteria or increase the size of the student population. To the contrary, it anticipates that the Coast Guard will utilize its criteria to select the best candidates from the pool of Member-nominated candidates for half of the slots in the incoming class, just as it will do to fill the slots in the other half of the incoming class. My legislation simply seeks to make Congress a partner in helping to put talented young people—from every corner of the country—on the path to a rewarding career in the U.S. Coast Guard.

I urge support of this commonsense, bipartisan legislation.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. LORETTA SANCHEZ

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 15, 2011

Ms. LORETTA SANCHEZ of California. Mr. Speaker, due to unforeseen circumstances, I was unable to vote on the Conference report to H.R. 1540, the National Defense Authorization Act of FY2012 on December 14, 2011. I would like to have it reflected in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD that if I had the opportunity to vote on H.R. 1540, I would have voted “aye.”

COPTIC CHRISTIANS UNDER ATTACK

HON. TED POE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 15, 2011

Mr. POE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, Christians in Egypt are under attack. The revolution may have overthrown a longtime dictator, but it has not freed Christians there from decades of persecution. In fact, it may have made matters worse.

Christians in Egypt are a deeply rooted minority of about 10 million in a largely Muslim society of 81 million. Prior to the revolution, they had a hard time. Discrimination was not an official policy of the Mubarak regime—he didn’t want to lose his aid dollars the U.S. was giving him—but he sure made it hard on Christians. When Christians wanted to build a new church or renovate their own, they had to get a permit. That’s fine, except for the fact that the Mubarak government intentionally delayed the permitting process. Churches would have to wait years for permits—some churches are still waiting. Mubarak pretended to fix this problem when he handed permitting control over to the 28 regional governors, but wait times for a permit didn’t get any better.

They were also discriminated against when it came to appointments to high-level government and military posts. There were only a handful of Christians in the upper ranks of the

security services and armed forces. There was one Christian governor out of 28, one elected Member of Parliament out of 454 seats, no known university presidents or deans, and very few legislators or judges. According to the State Department, public university training programs for Arabic-language teachers exclude non-Muslims because the curriculum involves the study of the Koran.

Other discrimination was official for everyone to see. Under Egyptian law, Muslim men can marry Christian women but Muslim women are prohibited from marrying Christian men.

And sometimes discrimination progressed to outright violence against Christians. In September 2010, in the Omraneya district of Cairo, Egyptian authorities reportedly used excessive force and live ammunition on peaceful demonstrators protesting the government’s continued refusal to approve a license to build a local church extension. Two people, including a teenager, were killed, and dozens were wounded. No one has been brought to justice.

When the government was using excessive force, it was radical Islamists. On January 1, 2011, a bomb detonated in front of a Coptic church, Al Qiddissin (Two Saints), in Alexandria, where a New Year’s prayer service was being held. At least 23 Christians were killed and nearly 100 wounded in the worst sectarian attack on Christians in Egypt in more than a decade. On January 23, then-Interior Minister Habib El-Adly asserted that conclusive evidence pointed to a militant group, Army of Islam, as responsible for the attack.

On January 11, 2011, an off-duty police officer opened fire in a train in Minya province, killing one Christian and injuring five others. The shooter, a Muslim, was charged with murder and will be tried in a state security court. The Ministry of Interior denied the shooting was sectarian.

When the revolution came, thousands of Christians fueled the protests, yearning for a new government that would respect the religious beliefs of its own people. But just a few weeks after the revolution, it became clear that Christians were actually in more danger.

During the revolution, a bunch of bad guys escaped prison. To protect themselves, monks at the Anba Bishoy monastery north of Cairo built a security wall. Well, the Egyptian military didn’t like that very much, so in late February they tore down the wall with machine guns and bulldozers. You can see video online of monks running for cover as the military is opening fire with heavy machinery. A monk and six church workers were injured in the process.

In February the governor of el-Minya, demolished 10 Coptic homes because the owners of those homes refused to contribute one-fifth of their property to build a mosque.

In early March in Cairo, 13 people were killed and nearly 150 wounded in clashes that erupted during large-scale demonstrations by Christians protesting the destruction of a church in the provincial town of Sol. The demonstrators called for the rebuilding of the church, punishment of perpetrators, and better treatment by Egyptian authorities. Some of the demonstrations reportedly blocked major highways. According to some accounts, the Egyptian military stood by for as long as four hours without intervening in the clashes.

On March 20, in Gena, Salafists, including an off-duty policeman, accused a Copt named

Ayman Mitri of renting an apartment to a prostitute, cut off one of his ears and mutilated his other ear. The attackers then informed the police that they had carried out the punishment required by Islamic law. As was usual under Mubarak, the police refrained from pressing charges and called for a “reconciliation” meeting between the religious communities. The Christian man agreed to compensation during the reconciliation session instead of pursuing criminal charges because the extremists allegedly threatened his family.

Also as under Mubarak, the authorities’ refusal to punish attacks on Christians has led to more attacks. On March 23, Salafists surrounded St. George’s church in Beni Ahmad and successfully demanded that a church expansion approved by the government be stopped. On March 27, they blockaded St. Mary’s church in Giza, saying it did not have a permit. After yet another “reconciliation” meeting between Copts and Muslims, services at the church were forbidden until it acquired a new permit.

On March 28, Salafists attacked a liquor store in Kasr El-Bassil owned by a Copt, destroyed other stores, and demanded that coffee shops be closed. One villager was killed and eight others injured. On April 5, hundreds occupied St. John the Beloved church in Kamadeer, stopping repairs after heavy rain, and told Copts that they were not allowed to pray there anymore. After yet another “reconciliation,” Copts were told to build a church 200 meters away, one without a dome, cross, bell, or any other external feature marking it as a church.

Beginning on April 15, over 10,000 demonstrators, mostly Salafists, protested in the southern province of Qena against the appointment of a new governor, Emad Mikhail, who is a Christian (the previous governor, Magdy Ayoub, was also Christian). Protesters blocked main roads, stopped buses to separate men and women passengers, and disrupted the main rail route in Upper Egypt for eight days. There were threats to bar Mikhail from the province and even to kill him. Tensions ran so high that local Christians stayed inside and couldn’t celebrate Palm Sunday. The armed forces refused to intervene, and, although Egypt’s cabinet initially rejected calls for the governor’s resignation, on April 25, Prime Minister Essam Sheraf surrendered and said he would “freeze” the appointment for three months.

On April 28, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom for the first time recommended to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton that Egypt be labeled a “Country of Particular Concern (CPC).” This designation refers, as commission chair Leonard Leo noted, to “the world’s worst religious freedom violators and human rights abusers.”

The abuse continues, with the worst violence against Christians in decades.

On October 9 thousands of peaceful demonstrators marched in downtown Cairo to protest the attack of a Coptic Christian church and called for an end to the systematic discrimination against Copts by the Egyptian authorities. At some point in the protest, violent clashes erupted between the protesters and the Egyptian military forces. Video shows Egyptian military tanks speeding through crowds and running over protesters. At one point, the Egyptian State Television aired a message calling on “honorable citizens” to

take to the streets to protect the Egyptian army from “the Coptic protesters.” The call was answered by Islamists who came in to join the violence against the Christians. In what is now known as the “Maspero Massacre,” over 25 people were killed and 300 injured. This marked the first time that the military—not the state police or radical Islamist groups—used violence against Christians.

Since the revolution, 5 churches have been attacked. The most disturbing part of these attacks is that they all happened in broad daylight, with the military standing by and watching. Those perpetrators who are clearly identified by video footage of the attacks have still not been arrested.

Former state security officials who tortured Christians have not been brought to justice either. One woman has burn marks on her arms and on her inner thighs from state security officials that wanted to know who the priest was who baptized her and what church she was baptized in. She wouldn't give his name, so the torture went on for three days. She knows the names of her abusers because they made sure they introduced themselves before they started the torture. But have they been tried? No.

Another man was tortured by state security because he converted from Islam to Christianity. He described how they removed his clothing, tied him down and put a metal chair between his legs and tied wires around his genitals and to his toes and then turned on the electricity. He knows the exact location of where he was tortured and the name of the person who tortured him, but of course he has not been brought to justice.

There is one more disturbing story to tell and that has to do with the kidnapping, rape, and forced marriage of Christian women to Muslim men. In testimony before the Helsinki Commission, it was described like this.

Christian girls are lured to an isolated place, drugged and kidnapped. Often, they are raped. They are then forced to marry their rapist and forbidden from returning to their families. Here is one story from Christian Solidarity International and the Coptic Foundation for Human Rights' report.

R. was abducted October 11, 2005. She had lived in the same neighborhood all of her life and knew all the neighbors. She was especially good friends with the daughter of a neighboring Muslim family, Sarah. They practically grew up together and were like sisters, inseparable. Sarah had an admirer named Wali, a classmate, who called her all the time. Wali began to call for Sarah on R.'s phone. His calls became so frequent that finally R. told Wali to stop calling her. He became very angry. “You will regret telling me not to call you,” he said in a threatening voice. She stopped seeing Sara after that. This happened in 2004.

After a year and a half, she received a call from Wali's telephone number. The voice was different and polite. A young man introduced himself as Amir, and said that he was an admirer of hers. He also knew everything about her. He wanted to meet her in a church. When R. said that she did not usually meet people she did not know, he replied that he knew she was on her way to church and that he would wait for her outside. There, he introduced himself and asked R.'s mother for her hand in marriage. The mother replied that it was not so simple. Amir went to their flat the next day

to speak to R.'s father. Amir told R.'s father that he wanted nothing from the family except for their daughter's hand in marriage. He had seen her in the street and instantly felt that she would be a perfect wife for him.

R.'s father did not want them to date until he met the boy's parents. Amir kept giving excuses: his mother was sick and his father was out of town. Finally, he told them that his father died. R.'s parents wanted to go as a family to pay respects but Amir said that this would not be necessary since his home was far away.

Later that week, Amir's sister contacted them and came to meet R. R. was engaged and ready to be married. She said she was not deeply in love, but that Amir seemed like a decent person. Amir's sister Christina asked R to go shopping with them. R.'s mother initially opposed the idea but finally relented when the girls told her they would not go far.

Christina offered to find a taxi and returned saying she had found one quickly. In retrospect, R. says that this was odd since they lived in a neighborhood in which it was usually difficult to find taxis.

Christina gave directions to the taxi driver to a close-by shopping area. It was a warm day and Christina offered R. some juice. R. declined but Christina insisted and drank it, remembering that the bottle was already opened. By the time she finished her juice, she felt quite dizzy. The taxi took a detour onto a dirt road and stopped in an isolated area. The driver said that there was something wrong with the car and he needed to check. Christina got out as well.

A van pulled up full of people and some came over to get her. Amir was one of them.

R. could not talk, even though she wanted to ask many questions. They began to beat her and she fainted.

When she woke up, she was in bed surrounded by many different strange men. “Amir” told her that he was in reality Wali, whom she had dismissed so abruptly in the past and he reminded her of his threat. He then announced that she was going to be married to a Muslim man.

She wanted to get out of the room but a woman blocked the door. She was locked in the room without her purse or her phone. This was the period of Ramadan, when under Islamic Law it is not possible to marry. Amir insisted on a conversion immediately. She was taken to the religious authorities where five other girls were waiting. All of them were Christians preparing to marry Muslims.

The papers were signed and the conversion was complete. R. was given the Muslim name of Fatimah. She refused to say the proclamation of faith and was beaten.

She was married to another man she had never met, Mahmoud. When she refused to have sex with him, the family held her down while he raped her. She began bleeding profusely.

She stayed with him for 9 months and was beaten every day. The Coptic cross which was tattooed on her wrist was burned off with acid and she still has scars. R. was forced to cover herself completely when she left her home and was called Fatima by the family members. Her veil was black.

R. pretended to observe the Muslim rituals and prayers, but it was just a pretense for her. As a result of the rape and constant beatings, she became physically ill. When her husband

went to work, he locked her in the house, alone, without a phone. She was never allowed to leave by herself. On the day of her escape, she told her in-laws that she was going to pray in the mosque but instead she called her mother and said she wanted to come home. She took a taxi to her parents' house. She is unable to have children as a result of the rape.

The practice is horrible and nothing is done about it. One parish father testifies that he has had over 50 cases of forced conversions of Coptic women in one year alone in his congregation. Another bishop says he has 45 women who were abducted and are now living in his safe house.

The Egyptian government has so far failed to protect Coptic Orthodox Christians. All we're talking about here is allowing people to practice what they believe. The government should not be inciting violence against them or running them over with tanks. It should be going after those that burn their places of worship or kidnap, rape, and torture them. Christians need to feel like the government has their back, not that it is out to get them. There cannot be unity and reconciliation until people feel like there is some sort of equality in society. There has to be consequences for persecution. This Administration needs to make the protecting of religious minorities a major point whenever it talks to its counterparts in the Egyptian government. They need to be clear that there will be consequences for them too if nothing changes. Our aid is not endless and it is not free. We should not support tyrants and dictators who oppress their own people. Egypt must uphold fundamental human rights, including protecting Christians.

And that's just the way it is.

RECOGNIZING THE OUTSTANDING PUBLIC SERVICE CONTRIBUTIONS OF CRAIG J. ROLISH AND THOMAS W. HABERKORN

HON. MARK S. CRITZ

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 15, 2011

Mr. CRITZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize two individuals, Craig J. Rolish and Thomas W. Haberkorn, who have devoted themselves to ensuring prosperous futures for the military veterans of southwestern Pennsylvania. Back in 1993, Mr. Rolish and Mr. Haberkorn helped to establish Veterans' Community Initiatives (VCI), an organization dedicated to finding employment for the men and women who have returned home from serving our nation in uniform. Since then, VCI has served nearly 5,500 clients and made approximately 4,000 job placements. The willingness of these men to devote the last 18 years of their lives to serving the needs of veterans is a testament to their appreciation for causes greater than themselves.

Mr. Rolish is currently the Vice President/Treasurer of VCI. Having served in the Air Force in Vietnam, Mr. Rolish was forced to personally confront the challenges a returning soldier must face in trying to reintegrate into society. While he could have easily devoted the years following his service to ensuring his own wellbeing, he instead chose to continue to work to improve the communities of southwestern Pennsylvania. Upon returning to