

There was no objection.

Mr. ISSA. I reserve the balance of my time, but I am prepared to close.

Ms. NORTON. I thank the chairman again for the haste with which he was able to get this bill heard today.

I have no further speakers, and I am pleased to yield back the remainder of my time.

Mr. ISSA. Mr. Speaker, I urge immediate support for this important reform for the District of Columbia, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. ISSA) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3902, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### CONDEMNING IRAN FOR ITS PERSECUTION OF YOUCEF NADARKHANI

Mr. PITTS. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 556) condemning the Government of Iran for its continued persecution, imprisonment, and sentencing of Youcef Nadarkhani on the charge of apostasy, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

##### H. RES. 556

Whereas the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights recognize that every individual has “the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion”, which includes the “freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance”;

Whereas Iran is a member of the United Nations and signatory to both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

Whereas the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran has reported that religious minorities, including Nematullahi Sufi Muslims, Sunnis, Baha'is, and Christians, face human rights violations in Iran;

Whereas in recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of incidents of Iranian authorities raiding religious services, detaining worshippers and religious leaders, and harassing and threatening members of religious minorities;

Whereas the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran has reported that Iranian intelligence officials are known to threaten Christian converts with arrest and apostasy charges if they do not return to Islam;

Whereas the Department of State's most recent report on International Religious Freedom, released on September 13, 2011, states that Iran's “laws and policies severely restrict freedom of religion,” and notes “government imprisonment, harassment, in-

timidation, and discrimination based on religious beliefs” including “death sentences for apostasy or evangelism”;

Whereas in October 2009, Youcef Nadarkhani, an Iranian Christian, protested an Iranian law that would impose Islam on his Christian children;

Whereas in September 2010, an Iranian court accused Youcef Nadarkhani of abandoning the Islamic faith of his ancestors, and condemned him to death for apostasy;

Whereas the Iranian court sentenced Youcef Nadarkhani to death by hanging;

Whereas on December 5, 2010, Youcef Nadarkhani appealed his conviction and sentence to the Supreme Revolutionary Court in Qom, Iran, and the court held that if it could be proven that he was a practicing Muslim in adulthood, his death sentence should be carried out unless he recants his Christian faith and adopts Islam;

Whereas from September 25 to September 28, 2011, an Iranian court held hearings to determine if Youcef Nadarkhani was a practicing Muslim in adulthood, and held that he had abandoned the faith of his ancestors and must be sentenced to death if he does not recant his faith;

Whereas on numerous occasions the judiciary of Iran offered to commute Youcef Nadarkhani's sentence if he would recant his faith;

Whereas numerous Government of Iran officials have attempted to coerce Youcef Nadarkhani to recant his Christian faith and accept Islam in exchange for his freedom;

Whereas Youcef Nadarkhani continues to refuse to recant his faith;

Whereas the Government of Iran continues to indefinitely imprison Youcef Nadarkhani for choosing to practice Christianity; and

Whereas the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran has reported that, at the time of his report, on October 19, 2011, Iran had secretly executed 146 people during that calendar year, and in 2010, Iran secretly executed more than 300 people: Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—

(1) condemns the Government of Iran for its ongoing and systemic violations of the human rights of the Iranian people, including the state-sponsored persecution of religious minorities in Iran, and its continued failure to uphold its international obligations, including with respect to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

(2) calls for the Government of Iran to exonerate and immediately and unconditionally release Youcef Nadarkhani and all other individuals held or charged on account of their religious or political beliefs;

(3) calls on the Administration to designate additional Iranian officials, as appropriate, for human rights abuses pursuant to section 105 of the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010 (Public Law 111-195); and

(4) reaffirms that freedom of religious belief and practice is a universal human right and a fundamental individual freedom that every government must protect and must never abridge.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. PITTS) and the gentleman from New York (Mr. HIGGINS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

##### GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. PITTS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may

have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on this measure.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. PITTS. I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the leaders on both sides of the aisle for allowing this resolution to come to the floor so promptly.

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reads:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Iran was one of the original signers of the declaration and has not removed their country from the agreement, even through changes in government.

In October of 2009, Youcef Nadarkhani was alarmed to find out that his children were being forced to participate in Islamic religious instruction at their local school.

Pastor Youcef had no radical reaction to this revelation. Indeed, he only went to the school and asked that his children be granted their rights under the Iranian Constitution to freedom of religion. These rights explicitly include parents' rights to bring up children under the religious teaching of the family.

For the crime of asking that his rights be respected, Pastor Youcef was summoned to a tribunal. There he was arrested and charged with unlawful protesting. This charge was later changed to apostasy.

After almost a year in prison, Pastor Youcef was convicted and sentenced to death. A panel of judges demanded that he recant his faith. When confronted with this demand, Pastor Youcef stated, “I cannot.”

While it is difficult to peer past the gates of an Iranian prison, we have some evidence that there has been continued pressure on Pastor Youcef to recant and that there may have been attempts to trap him into blaspheming Islam. Despite this pressure, he has remained faithful.

With our religious freedom protected by the First Amendment, it is difficult for any of us to imagine what Pastor Youcef has been going through, torn away from his children and family, placed in a high-security prison, with the likely outcome being the hangman's noose.

Today, we're not asking Iran to respect our laws or our conventions. We're asking them to abide by the agreements at the United Nations that they have signed on to.

The authorities in Iran are not proud of sentencing Pastor Youcef to death. Indeed, the Iranian Government doesn't even want their own people to

know that Pastor Youcef has been charged for practicing his religion. State media have actually reported that he is charged with rape and extortion, not apostasy.

Millions of Iranians are members of a minority religious group. Sunni Muslims, Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians are all proud to call Iran home. They want to live in peace with their neighbors, and they want to follow the law, but they cannot do so when their faith is under assault.

This evening, I'm proud that we have bipartisan support for this resolution. I'm proud to join with Representative KEITH ELLISON on this resolution. We stand together tonight in support of basic human rights, and we appeal to the highest authorities in Iran to spare the life of Youcef Nadarkhani.

Please let this father return to his wife and his children. Further still, let the Iranian people freely practice their faith. Stand by your commitments to your people and to the world.

With that, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. HIGGINS. I yield myself as much time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this important resolution. I would like to join my colleagues in calling for the immediate release of Youcef Nadarkhani and all of the other individuals who are held or charged on account of their religion.

I would also like to send a message to Pastor Youcef's family. Please know that the United States stands behind you, and we will do all we can to see that Youcef is set free.

Mr. Speaker, it is difficult to comprehend in this day and age that there are nations in which one is not free to practice the religion of their choosing. And in Iran, freedom of religion is not the only right Iranian citizens are denied. The Iranian regime also continues to maintain severe restrictions on freedom of expression, association, and assembly.

Tehran maintains strict control over domestic and international media, aimed at reducing Iranians' contact with the outside world. And individuals and groups risk arrest, torture, imprisonment for political protesting or cooperating with foreign human rights organizations.

□ 1950

Women's and minority rights activists and other human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists, and students are regularly arrested and harassed. Once imprisoned, detainees are ill-treated and tortured. These are just a few examples of the repressive tactics of the Iranian regime. We must continue to speak out against these injustices and call on our friends and allies to do the same.

Mr. Speaker, once again, I ask Iran to immediately release Pastor Youcef and end its State-sponsored persecution of religious minorities.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. PITTS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to a champion of human rights, the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. ADERHOLT), chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security and a member of the Helsinki Commission.

Mr. ADERHOLT. I want to thank my colleague, the gentleman from Pennsylvania, for his work on this in authoring this resolution. I think, as Mr. PITTS mentioned, both sides of the aisle have worked together on this issue. I know many times the American people get frustrated with what goes on here in Washington, but this is a time when Democrats and Republicans have come together, Mr. Speaker, and worked together, and I think this is certainly a crucial thing that we're doing tonight.

Few times, Mr. Speaker, do Members of Congress have the opportunity to work on life-and-death issues. I would tell my colleagues tonight, Mr. Speaker, tonight is one of those issues.

As has already been said by Mr. PITTS, this is an issue where a pastor, Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani, is in prison because of his belief.

There are few things in life that a government can provide for its citizens that's more important than religious expression and a simple ability to worship as one chooses. That is why the support of this resolution tonight is so important, House Resolution 556.

We would ask that the people of this country, Mr. Speaker, would remember not only Pastor Youcef but other citizens of Iran and other countries around the world that sit in the same position as Pastor Youcef does.

But tonight, we focus on Pastor Youcef. We ask the leadership in Iran to set aside this ruling and release Pastor Youcef, and also that he can be reunited with his wife and his two young boys who are there in Iran.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak tonight. I urge my colleagues to support this resolution.

Mr. HIGGINS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. ELLISON).

Mr. ELLISON. Mr. Speaker, tonight we come together, Republicans, Democrats, Muslims, Christians, and Jews, to stand for a very simple idea, and that idea is that it ought to be the case that a person can freely profess their faith. It ought to be the case that no matter what your religion is, it's dear to you, and you should not be punished for professing it publicly wherever you are.

You know, I have not really sought out a lot of attention for my own faith, but I got some of it anyway, and the fact is that I feel so privileged to be an American where I can, for the first time ever, when I was sworn in, use a book of my faith.

As I heard about the story of Pastor Youcef, I thought to myself, wow, you know, here I am a Muslim in a Christian majority country free to swear in on a Koran when I came to Congress,

and there he is a Christian facing the death penalty simply for professing his faith.

Pastor Youcef, he's a husband, he's a father. He has two young children. They're not even teenagers. They're 7 and 9 years old. I know they must be incredibly proud of their father, who would stand up against forces of repression that would kill him simply because he professed his faith in Christianity. It's wrong. I don't say it as an American only, I say it as a citizen of this small planet we live on, that every human being should be able to worship and seek the divine as they see fit.

Pastor Youcef deserves to be free. Pastor Youcef must be released. Pastor Youcef needs to walk out of that prison, grab his cross, go to his church, and lead his congregation in prayer, freely. He should be able to do it in his hometown in a local church.

All of us, no matter who you may be on this planet, you must stand for that idea, because if it can't be for one, it can't really be for any. We have to stand together, people of all faiths, all cultures, and all backgrounds and ethnicities and say that the right to seek the divine as you see fit must be an essential component of the human experience.

I also say a word of caution, and that is that the regime in Iran uses opportunities to deprive the people of human rights whenever they claim that there's a threat of war looming. I urge diplomacy because I think that whenever they can claim that they are under military threat, this allows them to crack down on any dissenter and try to use people like Pastor Youcef as an example so that other people will not freely express themselves and claim their God-given right not only to freedom of faith but to freedom of expression, the right to a fair trial.

You know, we come together in this place, this Congress that we're all in, and sometimes we debate taxes, and sometimes we debate where bridges should go, and we debate all kinds of stuff. But I pray that there will never be a debate about the simple right of every individual to worship and see God as they see fit or not to.

I just am particularly saddened when I think about how the early Muslim community, and Iran professes Islam, but early Muslims, the first Muslims were persecuted in their home of Mecca 1,400 years ago, and they fled their country, and they sought out their freedom of their faith in a distant land ruled by a Christian king in Ethiopia, and there they found sanctuary under that Christian king.

When their prosecutors and tormentors crossed the Red Sea and came into Africa and went to that king with bribes and said, Give us these people back, they're renegades, that Christian king listened to those early Muslims and said, You know what? These people are under my protection. You can go home.

I only wish tonight Pastor Youcef could get a return of that sanctuary in his own land.

Mr. PITTS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. FORBES), chairman of the Armed Services Subcommittee on Readiness.

Mr. FORBES. Mr. Speaker, I first want to compliment Congressman PITTS and Congressman ELLISON for their leadership in this matter and to recognize tonight, Mr. Speaker, as we go through our busy lives, we often take for granted the privilege of living in a Nation that's governed by Founders who realized there were a set of rights so fundamental, so much at the core of life itself that they could not come from any State or any government but had to come from the hands of the Creator of life himself.

At the center of these rights, some would say the foundation of them, is the freedom of religion. As we travel around the world and see other citizens who do not have these rights, we may be saddened or even angered, but when the government of any nation of the world is so dangerous to the lives of its citizens that it's willing to rob one of those citizens of life itself merely because he will not recant his faith, we not only feel sadness and anger, but also fear.

Tonight, the citizens of Iran should be afraid of such an oppressive and dangerous government. Tonight, the neighbors of Iran should be afraid of such an oppressive and dangerous government.

□ 2000

Tonight, the citizens of the world should be afraid of such an oppressive and dangerous government.

They should condemn this government for its actions. They should stand with this pastor, and they should join hearts with people of all faiths around the world to pray for his life and his safety.

Every Member of this body should adopt this resolution.

Mr. HIGGINS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. ANDREWS).

(Mr. ANDREWS asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. ANDREWS. I thank my friend for yielding and my friends from Pennsylvania and Minnesota for sponsoring this bill.

Tonight, we stand united and strong for the release of Pastor Youcef. Although the legal case for his release is overwhelming, as Mr. PITTS has outlined, we do not rely on the law in our plea. Though our political convictions shared among everyone on both sides of the aisle I believe here are deep, our appeal is not based on politics. Instead, our appeal is based on the ineffable human quality of the loving bond between a parent and his children.

Whether one worships in a mosque, a temple, a church, a synagogue, or some

other forum not known to us, whether one chooses not to worship at all, whether one lives on any of the continents of the world, practices any of the political ideologies of the world, is there not a common bond among those who feel the overwhelming love when they first hold their daughter or their son?

Is there not a common bond among those who feel the anxiety of worrying whether a sick child will be healed?

Is there not a common bond of the immense pride that a mother or a father feels when their children achieve some hard-fought goal?

Is there not a common bond of the empty and hurtful feeling that people know that someday they will have to depart from the children they love so dearly?

That day is coming all too soon for Pastor Youcef if those who are mothers and fathers, who are his captors, do not consider that ineffable human bond.

This is a man who tonight sits in prison awaiting execution because he loved his children enough to insist that they be free to worship as he and his family thought they ought to worship. This is labeled as "apostasy." The act of his arrest and impending execution is a monstrous act of inhumanity.

We do not appeal to the law, though it is on our side. We do not deal from political consensus, although I believe it exists in and out of this country. Our appeal is based on the simple, ineffable quality that parents have an innate right to love their children. This man has been deprived of this right. That deprivation should not exist for another hour, another day, another moment.

We will stand strong and united in calling for the humane release of Pastor Youcef, and we pray tonight that that wish will be granted by his captors, who must understand that they have that same ineffable love.

Mr. PITTS. I would like to inquire of the gentleman if he is prepared to yield back. I am prepared to close.

Mr. HIGGINS. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. PITTS. I yield myself the balance of my time.

Tonight, as Pastor Youcef sits in prison, awaiting a hangman's noose, I want him to know and the people of Iran to know and the people of the world to know that we stand with him. Our thoughts and our prayers are with him.

I would say to those international guests who might watch this telecast that you will never understand America until you understand that, in our Constitution, the very First Amendment contains the freedom of religion, not the freedom from religion. It contains the freedom of religion. It is not our Second, our Sixth, our 16th, or our 26th Amendment. It is our First Amendment. It is the first thing mentioned in the First Amendment—the freedom of religion: Congress shall not

act to establish a religion and shall not prohibit the free exercise thereof. That comes before the freedom of the press or speech or assembly or petition of grievances.

If you want to understand America, you must understand this basic belief that the Americans have in the right of the freedom of religion.

So we ask, we implore, the authorities in Iran: free Pastor Youcef. Keep faith with the documents you've signed. Free him. Return him to his family.

I urge support, Mr. Speaker, of the Members for House Resolution 556.

With that, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, a young Christian pastor sits today in prison in Iran—separated from his wife and young children, facing the death penalty—because he will not lie about his beliefs. He will not lie even to save himself.

He will not lie even to spare his family suffering. He is a man of extraordinary conviction. A man of decision. A man who knows what he believes. Youcef Nadarkhani will follow his conscience though it cost him everything.

Iranian courts have repeatedly asked him, on pain of death, to reject his Christian faith and say that he believes in Islam. He responds, "I cannot."

The resolution (H. Res. 556) on the floor this evening is not an attempt to say which religion is right. Rather, this is a resolution that affirms that Youcef Nadarkhani has the God-given right—even the responsibility—to believe as his conscience directs him.

No human government should interfere.

Iran is a member of the United Nations and signatory to both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Both documents affirm that that every individual has "the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion," which includes the "freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance;"

Under international law voluntarily agreed to by Iran, Youcef Nadarkhani has the right to change his religion.

He was free to change from Islam to Christianity. He is free to change back.

But the government of Iran is NOT free to force him in either direction. Iran has made a commitment to leave men like Youcef Nadarkhani in peace. This resolution calls on Iran to follow international law.

Iran sets aside seats in its Parliament for Christians and permits hundreds of churches to function across the country. And yet it also cracks down on religious minorities, falsely seeing them as a security threat.

The most recent U.S. State Department Religious Freedom Report lists numerous cases of arrest and detention of Christians, both lay people and leaders. For instance:

On April 11, 2010, government agents arrested 19-year-old Daniel Shahri, a Christian, on the basis of insulting Islam. Shahri was able to contact his parents on April 14, 2010, while being held in a prison in Isfahan. He was released on April 24, 2010 on bail and awaits a trial date . . .

On January 8, 2010, the Fars Provincial Ministry of Intelligence detained an unknown number of persons who were reportedly Christians. Under interrogation the detainees gave the names of those leading Christian groups in the area leading to further arrest.

On December 24, 2009, Pakdasht security forces raided a home-church gathering and arrested the 15 members who were in attendance. All 15 were released in early January with orders to return to sign documents. Upon returning three were rearrested and held until March 17 when they were released . . .

The report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom underscores the danger to Muslim converts to Christianity in Iran and a recent increase in arrests. This report, issued in May 2011, indicates that:

Since June 2010, more than 250 Christians have been arbitrarily arrested throughout the country. . . . In December 2010 and January 2011 alone, approximately 120 Christians were arrested. . . . During the reporting period, the number of incidents of Iranian authorities raiding church services, harassing and threatening church members, and arresting, convicting, and imprisoning worshippers and church leaders *has increased significantly*. Christians, particularly Evangelical and other Protestants, are subject to harassment, arrests, close surveillance, and imprisonment; many are reported to have fled the country. (emphasis added)

Tragically, Youcef Nadarkhani is not the only believer in prison. He is just the only one we know of who is facing the death penalty for apostasy.

Whatever the political conflicts between the United States and Iran, whatever the tensions over weapons—human rights do not change. Iran's signature on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights has not changed.

All nations, including Iran, must respect the consciences and religious freedom of their citizens—and not practice religious coercion.

Youcef Nadarkhani is not a political pawn. He is a person—a person being prayed for by citizens around the world.

Tonight, the U.S. Congress stands with him and with all people of conscience, calling on the Government of Iran to release him and ensure his safety.

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. Mr. Speaker, at no other point in recent history has it been more crucial for Congress to take action on international religious freedom. I would like to deeply thank my colleagues, Congressmen JOE PITTS and KEITH ELLISON, for sponsoring H. Res. 556 that addresses religious freedom in Iran. These vital issues deserve our immediate attention as we see religious persecution escalate internationally: in Iraq, for instance, Assyrian Christians were brutally murdered in their church and continue to be directly targeted by terrorist organizations; some have even been attacked and murdered on their own front doorstep. In China, thousands of Christians and Falun Gong practitioners are forced into re-education through labor camps while the lawyers that try to defend them are often imprisoned. Uygur Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists are targeted as separatists because of their faith.

Mr. Speaker, commitment to religious freedom is not just for one faith community but for people of all confessions throughout the world and across political lines. Religious freedom is

not only for Americans or Christians or Republicans or Democrats, it is a sacred right for all humanity. The U.N. Declaration of Human Rights, of which Iran is a signatory, allows for the “right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion” and this right includes the freedom to change religion or belief. I would like to note that Pastor Yousef was imprisoned and charged with apostasy in direct violation with the international standards that Iran had accepted. The fundamental right of religious freedom, furthermore, is enshrined in Iran's Constitution in Articles 13, 14, and 23.

Mr. Speaker, the Pitts-Ellison resolution condemns the Iranian government, one of the most horrific perpetrators of religious freedom violations, for its repression of religious minorities. It focuses, in particular, on the case of Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani, a Christian with the Church of Iran denomination, who faces imminent execution for his faith. Pastor Yousef's arrest and imprisonment resulted from questioning the mandate from the government of Iran that all school children be taught Islamic teachings.

Mr. Speaker, one of the most precious rights parents can have is having the freedom to educate their own children and bring up their children the way they believe is best for their family. Pastor Yousef was not given this foundational right to instill in his children a respect for freedom of religion and conscience. As the author of *The Children's Hope Act*, I know how critical it is for parents to make their own independent decisions about the education of their children. No parent should have to face death, as is the situation for Pastor Yousef, just for asking his government to grant him freedom of religion, even if that freedom of religion was narrowly defined to the freedom to educate and practice his faith in his own home.

Mr. Speaker, the case of Pastor Yousef is only one of many other deplorable religious freedom cases in Iran. A close personal friend of Pastor Yousef and a member of the Council of Elders for the Church of Iran described the egregious situation for Christians in the Middle East as strikingly similar to “the final decision in Germany,” when the Nazis religiously and racially “cleansed” German society of the Jews. This elder ended by saying that the “international reaction [to the religious cleansing in the Middle East] is also like the time of Hitler. They waited and didn't react until it was too late.” In Iran, at least 285 Christians were arrested during the first half of 2011 without reaction.

Mr. Speaker, one such case of the silently persecuted is Masoud Delijani, a school teacher in Kermanshah, Iran, who was arrested by plain clothes intelligence officers in March 2011. He was arrested, together with his wife and nine other Christian converts, when they had gathered in a house church for a service. He was held in solitary confinement and was severely pressured both mentally and physically. The court eventually charged him with having faith in Christianity and for holding illegal house church gatherings.

Mr. Speaker, the Revolutionary Court of Kermanshah province recently sentenced Masoud Delijani to three years in prison. Sources report that his trial was anything but fair: he was denied the right to choose his own advocate or defend himself against the charges levied. Masoud Delijani is now being held in Deizal-Abad prison of Kermanshah to

serve his three-year prison sentence. The central prison of Kermanshah is described as horrendous and sickening by knowledgeable sources.

Mr. Speaker, the cases described above would largely go unnoticed and the persecuted would be forced to suffer if we are silent. Given our own freedoms in America and the responsibility to represent the concerns of our constituents who are concerned with the suffering of persons and families abroad, I believe we have a personal responsibility to stand up for justice and support those who are persecuted. I would also urge other world leaders to not wait to speak out on behalf of Pastor Yousef and his universal right of religious freedom until it is too late.

Mr. Speaker, Alexander Hamilton, one of the architects of our Republic, said, “The sacred rights of mankind are not to be rummaged for among old parchments or musty records. They are written, as with a sunbeam, in the whole volume of human nature, by the hand of the divinity itself; and can never be erased.”

Mr. Speaker, may the right of religious freedom touch those around the world and persons of all faiths, and may future generations walk in the sunlight of that most inalienable and universal freedom.

Mr. BERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H. Res. 556, which condemns the Government of Iran for its persecution, imprisonment, and sentencing to death of Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani.

Pastor Youcef is a 34-year old father of two who was arrested over two years ago for the crime of converting from Islam to Christianity. In October 2009 he was tried and found guilty of apostasy—and sentenced to death-by-hanging. More recently, the Iranian Supreme Court upheld the sentence.

Iranian law requires that a man accused of apostasy be given three chances to recant his beliefs and return to Islam. Pastor Youcef was given his three chances. In every instance, Youcef refused. Nothing, not even the threat of death, would discourage him from remaining true to his faith. He proved himself as religiously committed as he is physically, and morally, courageous.

Mr. Speaker, last September President Obama said, Pastor Nadarkhani has done nothing more than maintain his devout faith, which is a universal right for all people. . . . A decision to impose the death penalty would further demonstrate the Iranian authorities' utter disregard for religious freedom, and highlight Iran's continuing violation of the universal rights of its citizens.

Mr. Speaker, the resolution before us condemns the Government of Iran for its state-sponsored persecution of religious minorities and for its repression of freedom of thought and of religion, and calls for the immediate release of Youcef Nadarkhani and of all other individuals held or charged on account of their religion.

The House of Representatives should stand in solidarity with Pastor Youcef. I encourage all of my colleagues to support this important resolution.

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H. Res. 556, a resolution condemning the government of Iran for its ongoing repression of religious minorities, including 34-year-old Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani. I was an original cosponsor of this resolution, and

thank my friend Congressman PITTS for introducing this important legislation.

Just this past week, Iranian authorities renewed an order of execution for Christian Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani, a young father of two. Pastor Nadarkhani was originally arrested in 2009 for protesting the teaching of Islam at the public school that his children attended. He was later charged with apostasy which carried a much more severe penalty. Since 2009 he has been subjected to repeated attempts to coerce him to recant his faith—which he has courageously refused to do. Rather, Pastor Nadarkhani's perseverance in the face of this injustice is a source of great inspiration. In a 2010 letter from prison, he wrote that the true believer, "does not need to wonder for the fiery trial that has been set on for him as though it were something unusual, but it pleases him to participate in Christ's suffering. Because the believer knows he will rejoice in his glory."

Indeed, Pastor Youcef has faced a "fiery trial." And now, according to a February 22 Fox New story, the latest developments mean that Pastor Youcef may be "executed at any time without prior warning, as death sentences in Iran may be carried out immediately or dragged out for years."

Pastor Youcef's case is just the latest example of Iran's attacks on basic human rights, including freedom of religion. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in Iran in acts of repression and discrimination against religious minorities including Bahai's and Christians. These actions show a continuing disregard by Iranian authorities for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as well as its own constitution.

In addition to supporting this resolution condemning Iran for these shocking and flagrant violations of fundamental freedoms, I call on the government of Iran to immediately and unconditionally release Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. PITTS) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 556, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. PITTS. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

#### APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS TO BOARD OF VISITORS OF THE UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair announces the Speaker's appointment, pursuant to 10 U.S.C. 4355(a), clause 10 of rule I, and the order of the House of January 5, 2011, of the following Members of the House to the Board of Visitors of the United States Military Academy:

Mr. HINCHEY, New York;

Ms. LORETTA SANCHEZ, California.

#### FREEDOM OF RELIGION

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

Mr. PEARCE. Less than 1 month ago, Kathleen Sebelius issued a finding that said that every insurance company in the country would have to offer insurance products, some of which would offend the faiths of many people. This is against our Constitution, and it is against the rights of conscience of a free people.

Mr. Speaker, across religious lines, the people of New Mexico and the people especially of southern New Mexico—Catholic, Protestants and people of no religion, people across cultural lines, and people across racial lines—are gathering this Saturday: this Saturday to protest, this Saturday to stand and say that the government needs to back up out of our church.

This is not a Republican issue. This is not a Democrat issue. This is an issue of the Constitution and of a freedom-loving people.

So I encourage all who are across this United States to begin to organize and stand in the streets to tell the government that enough is enough. We are meeting this Saturday, March 3, in Las Cruces, New Mexico, from 1:00 to 2:30. It will be a very large gathering. There will be speakers from both parties and from all faiths.

We think that it is time for Americans to be united together again, as one people, against a government that has become too strong.

□ 2010

#### HOUSE ENERGY ACTION TEAM HOUR

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. GIBBS). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 5, 2011, the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. GARDNER) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. GARDNER. Mr. Speaker, I'm here tonight for one reason: to stand up for hardworking Americans who are spending far too much when they fill up at the pump, and I'm here for that same American who turns on the TV or reads the newspaper after a long day at work to see that Iran is threatening to cut off our oil supply out of the Middle East and to see continued inaction by this administration to discourage energy projects, energy production that would lower the price of gas here at home. These are Americans that are scared. They simply don't have the money in their pocket, in their budget to pay for these high prices, \$60 to fill up a tank of gas, \$80 to fill up the tank of gas.

I find it increasingly more difficult to explain to my constituents from rural Colorado why this government isn't advancing policies that will bring

down the prices at the pump. It pains me the look on people's faces when they tell me that they're making \$10 an hour and are paying upwards of \$4 for a gallon of gas. What are they supposed to do, Mr. Speaker, stop going to work because gas is so expensive?

We are facing a significant crisis, and it's a travesty, it's a shame. My colleagues here tonight are here to say we will not stand for it.

How do I go back home this weekend to explain to my constituents why gas prices have risen \$1.80 per gallon since this President took office? How do I explain that this administration may be willing to tap the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, which is only to be used when there is a severe energy supply disruption, instead of opening up more land for exploration, which brings me to my next point.

Mr. Speaker, this administration alleges that it has opened up vast amounts of our lands for leasing. In fact, just a few days ago, on February 23, at the University of Miami, I quote:

Under my administration, America is producing more oil today than at any other time in the last 8 years.

This is simply false, a false telling of reality. While it may be true that new production is occurring on private lands where the President can't involve his anti-energy administration, Federal lands and offshore development is far below what it has been in previous years. Let me cite to you some very startling statistics.

According to an article on E&D on Monday, just a few days ago, production of natural gas on public lands and waters in fiscal year 2011 dropped 11 percent from 2010. That's a drop of 11 percent on public lands and waters in fiscal year 2011. Oil production on Federal lands dropped 14 percent since last year, and this reduction was most significant in the gulf, which declined by 17 percent since 2010.

According to a Wall Street Journal editorial from the other day, drilling plans have historically been approved 73 percent of the time. Since the beginning of 2012, the President has only approved 23 percent.

Approval of an offshore drilling plant typically takes about 92 days right now. That's 31 days over average.

In 2000, just 12 years ago, 32 percent of our oil was from Federal lands. Why? In 2010 that number shrank to 19 percent of total U.S. production. Let me say that again. In 2000, 32 percent of our oil was from Federal lands. In 2010 that number shrank to 19 percent of total U.S. production.

We aren't opening up our Federal lands for development, and that's the reason for the significant drop. The total onshore acreage leased under this administration in 2009 and 2010 is the lowest in over 20 years.

Mr. Speaker, the President has claimed that he is opening up new offshore areas for production and more land for leases. Again, this is false. Many of these lease sales were already