

IS ANYBODY LISTENING?

HON. FRANK R. WOLF

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 31, 2014

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Speaker, in yesterday's USA Today, columnist Kirsten Powers raised an important question,

QUOTE: "Iraq's Christians are begging the world for help. Is anybody listening?" UNQUOTE.

Mr. Speaker, this is the seventh consecutive legislative day that I have come to House floor to ask that same question:

Is anybody listening?

Less than two weeks ago, on July 19, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, more commonly referred to as ISIS, ordered Christians to convert to Islam, pay taxes levied upon non-Muslims, or be killed.

In the region around Mosul—what we know as Nineveh in the Bible—there is not a single Christian left.

Think about that. There is not one Christian left in the ancient heart of Iraqi Christianity. A 2,000-year presence wiped away before our eyes in just a matter of weeks.

Yet President Obama has said nothing.

And Secretary of State Kerry has said nothing.

ISIS has driven people from their homes, taken their cars as they attempted to leave and stripped them of all their money and possessions.

We have heard accounts of ISIS terrorists cutting the fingers of people to steal their wedding rings.

Yet President Obama has said nothing.

And Secretary of State Kerry has said nothing.

Gruesome videos produced by ISIS are appearing on Internet showing beheadings and public displays of dismembered Christians. I couldn't even watch the video to the end; it was that grotesque.

Yet President Obama has said nothing.

And Secretary of State Kerry has said nothing.

The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Samantha Power—who made a name for herself denouncing the U.S. and other governments' failure to act in the face of genocide—also has been silent on these genocidal acts.

What Power famously labeled "A Problem from Hell" is now taking place in Iraq on her watch.

Yet she says nothing in her post at the UN in New York.

Perhaps this lack of action should not be surprising given that her boss, President Obama, has said nothing.

President Obama has had multiple opportunities to use his "bully pulpit" to raise global attention to this genocide.

But we have heard NOT ONE WORD on the situation of the Christians being driven out of Iraq.

Let me lay out what has happened in Iraq just in the last six weeks:

All of Christians in Mosul have fled to the north, to Alqosh, Dohuk and other Assyrian villages.

In nearby Qaraqosh, 50,000 Assyrian Christian residents have fled from fighting between ISIS and Kurds.

All Christian institutions in Mosul—all 45 churches monasteries and cemeteries—have

been looted, destroyed, occupied, converted to mosques or shuttered.

All non-Sunni Muslim groups in Mosul—Shabaks, Yazidis and Turkmen—have been targeted by ISIS. Most have fled.

Water and electricity have been cut off by ISIS. The water shortage in the areas surrounding Mosul is now a full-blown crisis.

Mosul is now governed under Sharia law.

Congress is about to adjourn until after Labor Day. If the events of the last two months are any indication, one can only imagine the horrors that await over the next five weeks.

Absent urgent action what more will be on this list?

We cannot continue to sit back and watch these atrocities unfold.

President Obama, Secretary Kerry, Ambassador Power—before you take your summer vacations, you have a moral obligation to speak up.

Martin Luther King said QUOTE: "In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends." UNQUOTE

President Obama, in your lifetime, books will be written on the end of Christianity in the Middle East.

History will acknowledge you and your administration's lack of will to do something—anything.

You have the power and the pulpit to do something before it is too late.

If you continue to do nothing, your silence will remain heavy on your conscious long after you leave office.

Mr. President, there are a number steps you can take right now that would make a difference—steps that don't require new funds or additional congressional action:

ONE. You can sign the bipartisan legislation approved by the House and Senate to create a special envoy to promote religious freedom in the Middle East that has been sitting on your desk this week. It is just waiting for your signature.

You can name someone to fill this post who can immediately deploy to the region to work with the Kurdish and Iraqi governments.

TWO. You can appoint someone in your administration to be the lead person coordinating all of the U.S. government resources necessary to stop this genocide.

THREE. You can publicly thank the Kurdish authorities for protecting the Christians and other religious minorities who have fled ISIS and found refuge in the Kurdish region;

FOUR. You can work with trusted NGO's—like Catholic Relief, Save the Children, UNICEF and others—who are already on the ground trying to help, but need U.S. assistance and leadership to help more people.

You can make sure they have the food, water, housing and medical resources to help the victims of this genocide; and

FIVE: You can direct the Secretary of State and USAID administrator to reprogram existing funds to provide these resources to trusted NGO's on the ground.

Mr. President, those are five simple steps you can do now and over the next five weeks that would make a difference.

All it takes is your interest and your leadership.

This April marked the 20th anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda.

One need only look at President Clinton's continued regret for his failure to act to stop

the Rwandan genocide to see how President Obama and his administration will feel years from now for their failure to act.

Last year, Clinton said "If we'd gone in sooner, I believe we could have saved at least a third of the lives that were lost . . . it had an enduring impact on me."

They would do well to recall the words of Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, who said: QUOTE: "We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented."

Mr. Speaker, I close with the words of German Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who stood up to the tyranny and horror of Nazism, and said, QUOTE: "Silence in the face of evil is itself evil. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act."

It's time to act, while there are still people left to save.

Listen to the words of Psalm 82:3–4:

Defend the weak and the fatherless; Uphold the cause of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; Deliver them from the hand of the wicked."

Also, in the Old Testament in Ecclesiastes 4:1 it says,

"Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed—and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors—and they have no comforter."

Mr. President, I call on you to be on the side of the oppressed Christians.

SECURITY AND HUMANITARIAN SUPPORT FOR THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN IRAQ

HON. TRENT FRANKS

OF ARIZONA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 31, 2014

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. Mr. Speaker, last month, 55 of my colleagues and I sent a priority letter to President Obama urging him to actively prioritize security and humanitarian support for the Christian community in Iraq. We specifically warned him of the dangers and brutality of the terrorist group ISIS in Iraq who are now rampaging across Iraq and terrorizing the vulnerable Christian population.

In the letter, we specifically pointed out to Mr. Obama that QUOTE, "Parts of Syria and Iraq that have previously fallen under the rule of ISIS have witnessed summary execution, beheadings and even crucifixions." And that QUOTE, "Absent immediate action, we will most certainly witness the annihilation of an ancient faith community from the lands they've inhabited for centuries." UNQUOTE

Tragically, Mr. Speaker, President Obama—who once likened ISIS to a junior varsity basketball team—simply ignored us again, as he has done so many times before. And now ISIS, this "junior varsity basketball team", is beheading their way across Iraq and has declared that there would be QUOTE "nothing for [the Christians] but the sword" if they do not convert." Last week, ISIS torched a 1,800-year-old church in Mosul and ruthlessly destroyed the historic tomb of Jonah. Images of ISIS beheadings, crucifixions, rapes, torture and mass execution are all over the Internet and social media. Just this morning, I met with

a group of NGOs based in Iraq who told me ISIS beheaded six Christians—then proceeded to play soccer with their decapitated heads.

This past Sunday, for the first time in 1,600 years, there was no Mass in Mosul. The head of Iraq's largest Christian community said, "For the first time in the history of Iraq, Mosul is now empty of Christians."

Mr. Speaker, ISIS has systematically and insidiously targeted Iraq's ancient Christians, and they are now nearly extinct. It can rightly be called targeted religious cleansing, and it is a crime against humanity."

And yet, we hear not a word from the President of the United States when a Christian genocide is taking place at this very moment. And we have not heard one syllable about what his administration is doing or planning to do to relieve or protect persecuted Christians in Iraq.

So, on the floor of this house, I repeat the words we wrote in a letter to President Obama a month ago, QUOTE, "we urge you and your administration to urgently and actively engage with the Iraqi central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government to prioritize additional security support for these particularly vulnerable populations and provide emergency humanitarian assistance to those affected communities. Absent immediate action, we will most certainly witness the annihilation of an ancient faith community from the lands they've inhabited for centuries." UNQUOTE

Mr. Speaker, if President Obama continues to ignore this Christian Genocide in Iraq, history will record that it was Barack Obama who idly stood around and let it happen.

TRANSPARENT AIRFARES ACT OF 2014

SPEECH OF

HON. HENRY A. WAXMAN

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, July 28, 2014

Mr. WAXMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise to submit the following letters into the record with regard to the debate on H.R. 4156.

CONSUMER FEDERATION
OF AMERICA

July 18, 2014

DEAR REPRESENTATIVE: Consumer Federation of America, a nonprofit association of consumer organizations around the country that represent the interests of millions of your constituents, urges you to reject H.R. 4156, the Transparent Airline Act of 2014. This bill may be taken up on the suspension calendar, but at whatever point it is presented, we ask you to oppose it.

There is nothing transparent, or pro-consumer, about this bill. It would allow airlines to advertise fares that do not include the mandatory taxes, hiding the true cost until consumers reach the end of the purchase process. This would make the cost of airline tickets appear artificially low and prevent budget-conscious consumers from determining upfront whether they can afford to fly and how the cost of doing so compares to other options, such as traveling to their destinations by train or car.

The argument that consumers are entitled to know how much of the ticket price is comprised of taxes is totally disingenuous—that breakdown does show before consumers complete their purchases. Unlike charges for things such as checked baggage and extra

legroom, however, taxes are not optional. Therefore, consumers do not base their air travel decisions on the amount of the taxes, which are standardized. Just as with buying gasoline, they shop for airline tickets based on the total cost including taxes. They are entitled to know that cost at the onset.

Please stand with the traveling public in supporting real truth in airfares by rejecting H.R. 4156.

Sincerely yours,

SUSAN GRANT,
Director of Consumer Protection.

JULY 15—CONSUMER GROUPS' LETTER TO U.S. HOUSE MEMBERS

DEAR MEMBERS OF THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES: We the undersigned consumer groups have learned that highly controversial H.R. 4156, the Transparent Airfares Act of 2014, is on the short list in the House for possible inclusion on the Suspension Calendar prior to the August recess. H.R. 4156 is contentious legislation that would harm millions of consumers by reversing a U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) rule implemented in 2012 as a cure to misleading airline advertising. We urge you to strongly object to the inclusion of H.R. 4156 on the Suspension Calendar.

Consumer groups were not alerted to the prospect of this legislation, nor were we provided any opportunity for input before Committee markup. H.R. 4156 was rushed by voice vote through the House Transportation Committee on April 9, 2014 after just 9 minutes of discussion. There were no hearings, no outreach for public opinion. This rushed process has denied other stakeholders an opportunity to inform Congress of their views and the flaws in this bill.

Now, after steamrolling the bill through Committee, airlines hope to rush the bill through the House under Suspension of the Rules. But this is not the type of unobjectionable proposal that the Suspension Calendar is designed for; rather, it is harmful and controversial special-interest legislation. There is not one consumer group or business travel organization that supports this legislation; most have publicly criticized both the bill and the rushed process.

This anti-consumer legislation serves no purpose, in our view, other than to mislead consumers about the real price of airfare—to the benefit of airlines, but at the expense of consumers.

Indeed, The New York Times Editorial Board on April 22 criticized the bill in an editorial saying: "This push to mislead consumers is particularly galling since recent mergers, like that of American Airlines and US Airways, have made the industry less competitive." Likewise, The Washington Post reported on April 24: "Consumers have reacted to this bill in the same way their advocates have: They're dead-set against it."

We urge you to stand up against this anti-consumer move by the airlines and to ask House leadership not to schedule this highly controversial bill for the Suspension Calendar, and instead insist on a fair opportunity for travel industry and consumer groups' input and proper deliberation.

Sincerely,

AirlinePassengers.org, Association for Airline Passenger Rights, Business Travel Coalition, Consumers Union, Ed Perkins, Consumer Advocate, FlyersRights.org, National Consumers League, Travelers United, U.S. PIRG.

TRAVELERS UNITED, INC.,
Arlington, VA, July 30, 2014.

DEAR REPRESENTATIVE: I write to outline the harm the Airfare Transparency Act (H.R. 4156) will cause for passengers, travel agen-

cies and corporate travel managers. And, to highlight the strong opposition to this legislation from consumers, the aviation distribution industry and corporate travel managers.

HR 4156 is completely unnecessary for its proposed impact.

Under this bill aviation will become the only industry in American permitted to add federal excise taxes and fees at the end of the ticket buying process, just like local taxes and fees.

HR 4156 will enshrine drip pricing into law, a form of deceptive and misleading pricing that has long been battled by the FTC and DOT.

This legislation makes understanding airfares less transparent, more confusing and misleading.

Airlines and their unions claim that this bill is necessary to ensure passengers know "exactly how much of their ticket price is attributable to federal taxes and fees while at the same time knowing the full price of air travel before they purchase a ticket."

The current DOT rules allow for airlines to do exactly that. Specific language in the regulation codifies how that can be done. Plus, airlines have many other opportunities to clearly outline taxes and fees paid when purchasing tickets. Airlines can explain taxes and fees on ticket itineraries. Airlines can print taxes and fees on boarding passes along with Sudoko games and the weather. However, airlines choose not to do this.

When airlines claim that they are the unjustly subjected to revealing federal excise taxes prior to purchase, they are wrong. Every other industry in the U.S. that is subjected to federal excise taxes and federal fees includes those costs in the product price. These include gasoline, liquor, beer, tires, trucks and others. The taxes and fees that other transportation and travel entities add to the final prices are state and local taxes and fees—airlines are exempt from those taxes.

The only part of this bill that would change what can be done under the current DOT full-fare regulations is the misleading and deceptive ability to advertise incomplete low prices for which no consumer can purchase air travel.

HR 4156 makes airfares more difficult to understand and purchase. It was passed out of committee and under suspension of rules with no consumer input and no consultation with the airline distribution network of travel agents and corporate travel managers that deal with the public on a day-by-day basis.

This bill has been opposed by far more than a few "talking heads."

Almost every major newspaper has opposed HR 4156 in editorials or articles over the past few months. The papers and magazines include The New York Times, Washington Post, USA Today, Chicago Tribune, Time Magazine, and many others. A change.org petition garnered more than 127,000 signatures specifically opposing this bill.

Major consumer organization, in addition to Travelers United (formerly Consumer Travel Alliance), have aligned to oppose this legislation. These organization include AAA, Association for Airline Passenger Rights, Business Travel Coalition, Consumer Federation of America, Consumers Union, Ed Perkins (Consumer Advocate), FlyersRights.org, National Consumers League and U.S. PIRG.

This legislation undoes years of hard work by advocates to ensure that consumers are not duped when purchasing airfare. Transparency cannot be achieved through confusion.

Sincerely,

CHARLIE LEOCHA,
Chairman.