

clear regulatory changes are needed to ensure small passenger vessels have the right safety measures in place to limit the possibility of fire and help evacuate the vessel of passengers in the event a fire does start.

The *Conception* is one of about 325 small passenger vessels built before 1996 and exempt from stricter safety standards imposed on newer vessels.

This bill offers a number of common-sense provisions that will improve passenger vessel safety. These include: requiring these types of vessels to have no less than two avenues of escape from all areas accessible to passengers; mandating safety standards for the handling, storage and operation of lithium ion batteries; and, establishing standards for interconnected fire alarm systems.

I appreciate the hard work of the National Transportation Safety Board and the U.S. Coast Guard Inspections and Compliance Directorate. I especially appreciate the Commandant's Marine Safety Information Bulletin issued on September 10 reminding owners, operators and masters of passenger vessels to adhere to the regulations related to firefighting, lifesaving, emergency preparation and means of escape. And, more specifically, I appreciate the attention to the issue of unsupervised charging of lithium-ion batteries and the extensive use of power strips and extension cords.

Given the horrific nature of this tragedy, it is imperative that we establish stricter safety standards onboard these boats where so many children and families have such enjoyment. I believe this bill is a pragmatic, common-sense solution to improve safety on these older vessels, and I urge it to be included in the Coast Guard Reauthorization Act.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.

By Ms. COLLINS (for herself and Ms. SINEMA):

S. 3048. A bill to authorize certain aliens seeking asylum to be employed in the United States while their applications are being adjudicated; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I rise today to introduce the Asylum Seeker Work Authorization Act of 2019, which is similar to a bill introduced by Representative PINGREE in the House. My bill would allow asylum seekers to seek employment 30 days after applying for asylum, provided their applications are not frivolous, their identities have been verified, and their names run through the Federal government's terrorist watch lists. This change would allow asylum applicants to work and contribute to society without being dependent on assistance from local governments while their claims are being adjudicated.

Under current law, asylum seekers must wait 180 days after filing their applications before they are allowed to work. The 180-day requirement was

adopted by the Clinton Administration in 1994 out of concern that some asylum seekers might apply for asylum primarily as a means of getting a work authorization. Clearly, this change has only transferred the burden of care for these asylum seekers onto communities across the Nation.

One such community is Portland, Maine. Earlier this year, over the span of several weeks, a surge of asylum seekers from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola arrived in Portland after crossing our southern border. These asylum seekers could have given a much-needed boost to Maine's very tight labor market—our unemployment rate is just 2.8 percent—but the lengthy work-authorization process prevents these asylum seekers from getting jobs even to support themselves.

Thankfully, the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations for Humanitarian Assistance and Security at the Southern Border Act of 2019 made funds available to assist local communities dealing with a sudden influx of asylum seekers. The City of Portland and private organizations in southern Maine received \$892,586 from that Act. While I am pleased that these funds have been provided to Portland and other communities around our country, it would be a better solution if those seeking asylum were able to join the workforce and achieve self-sufficiency as quickly as possible while awaiting the outcome of their cases.

It is my hope that the change proposed by my bill will lessen the burden on the budgets of communities hosting asylum seekers while allowing these individuals and their families to support themselves as they want to do, bringing needed skills to the cities and towns in which they settle. I encourage my colleagues to support it.

By Mr. MORAN:

S.J. Res. 61. A joint resolution approving the request of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for a waiver under section 1703E(f) of title 38, United States Code; to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to submit the following letter from U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Robert L. Wilkie, for the RECORD.

So Ordered.

Hon. MITCH MCCONNELL,  
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate,  
Washington, DC 20510.

DEAR SENATOR MCCONNELL: In accordance with the requirements of section 1703E(f)(2) of title 38, United States Code, enclosed is the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) report on a request for a waiver to allow VA to pilot community partnered collaborations to expand dental care for Veterans. We request that copies of this waiver be provided to the Chair and Ranking Member of applicable standing committees with jurisdiction to report a bill to amend the provision or provisions of law that would be waived by VA, consistent with section 1703E(f)(3).

As required by section 1703E(f)(2), the enclosed report describes in detail the specific

authorities to be waived under the pilot program; the standard or standards to be used in the pilot program in lieu of the waived authorities; the reasons for such waiver or waivers; a description of the metric or metrics VA will use to determine the effect of the waiver or waivers upon the access to and quality, timeliness, or patient satisfaction of care and services furnished through the pilot program; the anticipated cost savings, if any, of the pilot program; the schedule for interim reports on the pilot program describing the results of the pilot program so far and the feasibility and advisability of continuing the pilot program; the schedule for the termination of the pilot program and the submission of a final report on the pilot program describing the result of the pilot program and the feasibility and advisability of making the pilot program permanent; and the estimated budget of the pilot program.

Consistent with section 17.450 of title 38, Code of Federal Regulations, this report also includes the geographic locations for each pilot program, the rationale for those selections, and how VA believes the selected locations will address deficits in care for a defined population; any applicable provision of existing regulations implementing any laws to be waived; and any more specific definitions of terms included in section 17.450(b), as necessitated by the specific provisions of the proposed pilot program.

The Office of Management and Budget advises that there is no objection to the submission of this waiver proposal to Congress and that its enactment would be in accord with the program of the President.

Thank you for your continuing support of our mission. A similar letter has been sent to other leaders of the Congress and the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs.

Sincerely,

ROBERT L. WILKIE.

#### SUBMITTED RESOLUTIONS

SENATE RESOLUTION 453—HONORING THE EMPLOYEES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE AND THE UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Mr. MENENDEZ (for himself, Mr. CARDIN, Mrs. SHAHEEN, Mr. COONS, Mr. UDALL, Mr. MURPHY, Mr. Kaine, Mr. MARKEY, Mr. MERKLEY, and Mr. BOOKER) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations:

S. RES. 453

Whereas more than 81,000 people serve as employees of the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development, including locally employed staff, protecting and advancing national security, freedom, democracy, development, and free markets, for the benefit of the people of the United States and the international community;

Whereas employees of the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development together represent the United States in maintaining diplomatic relations in over 250 posts in 180 countries around the world, including in many inhospitable and dangerous regions;

Whereas employees of the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development promote American values and interests at home and abroad

S. RES. 454

Whereas José Daniel Ferrer García is a Cuban democracy and human rights activist who has dedicated his life to promoting greater political pluralism and respect for fundamental freedoms in Cuba;

Whereas Mr. Ferrer was born in Cuba on July 29, 1970, in the province of Santiago de Cuba;

Whereas, in the late 1990s, Mr. Ferrer joined the Christian Liberation Movement (MCL), a peaceful political movement led by late Cuban activist Oswaldo Payá;

Whereas, through coordination with the MCL, Mr. Ferrer helped lead the Varela Project, an initiative to collect the signatures of citizens to petition the Government of Cuba for democratic reforms and protections for freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of assembly;

Whereas, in March 2003, as part of a series of sweeping arrests of 75 democracy activists, Mr. Ferrer was arrested by Cuban authorities for his work on the Varela Project and sentenced to 25 years in prison;

Whereas, in March 2004, Amnesty International declared the group of 75 democracy activists, including Mr. Ferrer, to be prisoners of conscience and called for their immediate and unconditional release;

Whereas, in 2009, Mr. Ferrer was honored with the Democracy Award given annually by the National Endowment for Democracy;

Whereas, in March 2011, as part of an agreement brokered by the Catholic Church, Mr. Ferrer refused to abandon his homeland and was released from prison to remain in Cuba;

Whereas, in August 2011, Mr. Ferrer founded the Patriotic Union of Cuba (UNPACU), a nonviolent political movement dedicated to promoting human rights, democratic principles, and fundamental freedoms in Cuba;

Whereas, on June 7, 2012, Mr. Ferrer testified via digital video conference at a hearing of the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate;

Whereas, since he was released from jail in March 2011, Mr. Ferrer has been frequently harassed, regularly surveilled, and repeatedly jailed by Cuban authorities for his role in UNPACU;

Whereas, on October 1, 2019, Mr. Ferrer was imprisoned arbitrarily by Cuban authorities for his leadership of UNPACU and outspoken advocacy for human rights and democratic principles in Cuba;

Whereas, on October 1, 2019, Cuban authorities detained 3 other members of UNPACU, Fernando González Vailant, José Pupo Chaveco, and Roilán Zarraga Ferrer;

Whereas a letter from Mr. Ferrer was smuggled out of prison stating that he had been tortured, mistreated, and denied proper medical attention, and that his life was put in danger while in detention;

Whereas the family of Mr. Ferrer has been permitted to visit him only twice since he was imprisoned arbitrarily on October 1, 2019, and the wife of Mr. Ferrer reported that she saw evidence that he had been physically abused and mistreated; and

Whereas, on November 28, 2019, the European Parliament approved a resolution condemning the arbitrary detention of Mr. Ferrer and calling for his immediate release; Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved*, That the Senate—

(1) condemns the arbitrary imprisonment of leading Cuban democracy and human rights activist José Daniel Ferrer and calls for his immediate and unconditional release;

(2) urges Cuban authorities to grant Mr. Ferrer immediate access to medical care and independent legal counsel;

(3) calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all members of the Patriotic

through their work and actions, promoting the safety and freedom of all Americans;

Whereas employees of the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development are a central component of our defense against international terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction;

Whereas employees of the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development work to preserve peace and freedom and promote economic prosperity and mutual understanding around the world;

Whereas employees of the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development daily work to reduce poverty, end hunger and malnutrition, fight disease, combat international crime and illegal drugs, and address environmental degradation;

Whereas employees of the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development daily work to promote economic development, commercial enterprises, economic prosperity, and United States job and trade promotion;

Whereas employees of the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development daily work to promote American ideals and values, human rights, freedom, gender equality, and democracy;

Whereas employees of the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development daily work to provide emergency and humanitarian assistance aid to respond to crises around the globe;

Whereas there are almost 50,000 local employees at posts that aid and support the work of the United States and the Department of State around the world;

Whereas at least 250 United States citizen employees, as well as family members, and many more locally employed staff, of the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development have made the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of their Nation;

Whereas employees of the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development personify the virtues of patriotism, sacrifice, service, and duty;

Whereas the families of employees of the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development make important and significant sacrifices for the United States;

Whereas multiple career Foreign Service and civil service employees of the Department of State upheld their oaths to defend the Constitution, uphold the law, and provide testimony in response to lawful subpoenas from congressional oversight hearings, risking their careers and personal safety for service to their nation;

Whereas these courageous employees of the Department of State, individuals who have served the Nation with distinction and represent our Nation's finest, include Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch, a distinguished career public servant who dedicated 33 years of her life as a Foreign Service Officer; Ambassador William Taylor, a diplomat who started his 50-year public service as a West Point cadet and served in every Administration since 1985; George Kent a career foreign service officer with multiple postings throughout the Department since 1992; Jennifer Williams, a 13-year veteran of the Foreign Service who has served overseas in Beirut and Jamaica, managed the United States Government's humanitarian assistance program for Syrian refugees from 2011 to 2014, and, most recently, has served as the Vice President's assistant on European and Russian affairs

since April 2019; Ambassador David Hale, who has served around the world for more than three decades with the Department, including as Ambassador to Pakistan, Lebanon and Jordan, and in his current role as Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs; David Holmes, who joined the foreign service in 2002 and was awarded the William Rivkin award for Constructive Dissent in 2014; Peter Michael McKinley, whose career in the foreign service spanned more than 35 years and included service as ambassador to Peru, Colombia, Afghanistan and Brazil, and Senior Adviser to Secretary Mike Pompeo; Philip Reeker, a 27-year veteran of the foreign service, including as acting assistant secretary of the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs; Catherine M. Croft, who has served as a special advisor for Ukraine in the State Department and on the National Security Council staff; and Christopher Anderson, a foreign service officer since 2005, who served at the United States Embassy in Kyiv from 2014 to 2017 and as the special adviser for Ukraine negotiations from August 2017 to July 2019; and

Whereas the Department of State has represented to Congress that “no employee has faced any adverse action by the Department for testimony before Congress” and committed that “the Department will not discipline any Department employee for appearing before Congress in response to a subpoena”; Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved*, That the Senate—

(1) honors the employees of the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development;

(2) calls on the people of the United States to reflect on the service and sacrifice of employees of the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development, wherever they serve, past, present, and future;

(3) thanks the local employees for their aid and support in the mission of the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development;

(4) expresses the deep appreciation of a grateful Nation to the employees of the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development who each and every day courageously and publicly stand up for their country and defend the Constitution, including those who have provided testimony to Congress in response to lawful subpoenas;

(5) urges the Department to fully and faithfully implement all its stated commitment to assist employees called to testify before Congress with the cost of legal fees; and

(6) calls on the Department to ensure that no personnel will face any retaliatory action, adverse personnel action, or other negative consequence for testifying or providing requested information to Congress, and emphasizes that any reprisal for testifying before Congress would be a violation of law.

**SENATE RESOLUTION 454—CALLING FOR THE IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF CUBAN DEMOCRACY ACTIVIST JOSE DANIEL FERRER AND COMMENDING THE EFFORTS OF JOSE DANIEL FERRER TO PROMOTE HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN CUBA**

Mr. MENENDEZ (for himself, Mr. RUBIO, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. CRUZ, Mr. CARDIN, Ms. COLLINS, and Mr. KAINÉ) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations: