

YEAR 2000 ACT

HON. JAMES A. BARCIA

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, October 2, 1998

Mr. BARCIA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce the Year 2000 Act. While most people are aware of the Year 2000 computer problem, I have consistently been struck by the lack of specific information on the exact nature and magnitude of the problem.

The Subcommittee on Technology, of which I am the Ranking Member, has taken the lead in holding hearings on the Y2K issue. We have spent a lot of time reviewing Federal efforts and promoting the free flow of information on the Y2K problem. However, there has been several gaps in our Y2K efforts, and the intent of this legislation is to fill these gaps.

This bill has four very specific goals: 1) to raise consumer awareness and create a consumer Y2K checklist; 2) to raise Y2K awareness in small and medium sized businesses and create a Y2K self-assessment checklist for the nation's small and medium-sized companies; 3) to require Federal agencies that have worked with outside entities to ensure that all date sensitive data exchanges are Year 2000 compliant; and 4) to require the Secretary of Commerce to report to Congress on the economic implications of a global Y2K problem.

Other than federal agencies, we have been given little more than anecdotal evidence and generalities regarding the total effect of the Year 2000 computer problem. However, there is general agreement that computer hardware and software, as well as embedded microchips found in many consumer products, could fail after January 1, 2000.

More importantly, I find that many people do not know how Y2K will impact them, nor do they know what specific actions they can take to minimize the impact of the Y2K problem on their everyday lives. This bill requires the Undersecretary for Technology at the Department of Commerce to develop a Year 2000 self-assessment checklist for consumers; provide a list of all federal government Year 2000 computer problem resources; list all GSA approved Year 2000 compliant products; and conduct a series of public awareness announcements and seminars on the impact of the Y2K problem on consumer products and services. These goals are consistent with the recommendations made by witnesses who have appeared before the Subcommittee on Technology, and I am confident that with the right information, consumers will be able to make those decisions necessary to minimize the disruption the Y2K computer problem.

The situation at small and medium-sized businesses mirrors that of consumers. The nation's more than 381,000 small- and medium-sized manufacturers contribute more than half of the country's total value in manufacturing. However, as of 1997, 88% of all companies with fewer than 2000 employees had not yet started Year 2000 remediation projects.

Small and medium-sized companies are an integral part of the business supply chain, becoming increasingly reliant on computer applications for manufacturing operations, accounting and billing practices, and meeting just-in-time order and delivery concepts. To assist our small and medium-sized manufacturers in

meeting the Y2K challenge, this bill requires that the National Institute of Standards and Technology's highly successful Manufacturing Extension Partnership program, working with the Small Business Administration, identify the best practices to attack the problem, develop a Year 2000 self-assessment checklist, and list all federal government Y2K resources including the General Services listing of approved Y2K compliant products.

Federal agencies make thousands of date sensitive data exchanges every day. These data exchanges include social security and Medicare information, information related to the air traffic control system, and important financial transactions. Consequently, as federal computer systems are converted to process year 2000 dates, the associated data exchanges must also be made Year 2000 compliant.

The testing and implementation of Year 2000 compliant data exchanges must be closely coordinated with exchange partners. Agencies must not only test its own software, but effective testing includes end-to-end testing, and agreed upon date formats with all exchange partners. If these Year 2000 data exchanges do not function properly, data will not be exchanged between systems or invalid data could cause receiving computer systems to malfunction. In other words, regardless of federal efforts to fix its own computer systems, unless their data exchange partners have Y2K compliant systems, the computer network as a whole will fail.

A recent GAO report entitled "Year 2000 Computing Crisis: Actions Needed on Electronic Data Exchanges" found that federal agencies have made little progress in addressing this data exchange issues. This legislation is based on these specific GAO recommendations, and will help ensure that federal agencies fully address the data exchange issue. This legislation also requires agencies to establish a test schedule with data exchange partners, notify exchange partners of the implications and consequences of non-compliance, develop contingency plans, and send a quarterly report to Congress outlining their progress.

Finally, this bill requires the Secretary of Commerce to report to Congress on the international implications of the Y2K problem, and outline the potential impact on the U.S. economy. Again, we lack specific information on how other countries are addressing the Y2K issue, and the international implications are truly profound. Disruptions in international financial services, international air travel, international telecommunications, and international commercial transactions are all possible scenarios.

However, it is near impossible to make contingency plans in the face of so little and often inadequate information. And as I mentioned earlier, it is lack of information that leads to panic and uncertainty. I believe that such an international assessment could be a guide post for federal and private sector actions.

With so much to be done before January 1, 2000, there isn't much time to act. While we can't legislate Y2K compliance, we must ensure the availability of good information so that consumers and small businesses are able to check existing products, make sure their equipment will work with other equipment, and most importantly, successfully address any Y2K problems in their operations.

With this information in hand, I believe that the public and Congress will be able to make the right decisions and avoid the panic which is so often predicted in articles about the Y2K computer crisis.

I urge co-sponsorship of this legislation, as well as its swift passage.

RAPE OF NUNS IN INDIA MUST BE INVESTIGATED

HON. JOHN T. DOOLITTLE

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, October 2, 1998

Mr. DOOLITTLE. Mr. Speaker, I was very distressed to learn from Dr. Gurmit Singh Aulakh, President of the Council of Khalistan, of the rape of four nuns in the Madhya Pradesh state of India. According to published reports, a gang of armed men forced their way into a Christy Jyoti Convent School, vandalized school property, and raped and terrorized the nuns.

This terrible incident shows that it is not safe to be a member of a religious minority in Hindu India. Christian groups have reported a spate of attacks on members of the minority community since a Hindu nationalist-led coalition took office in New Delhi six months ago. The Indian government seems to have little interest in protecting the rights of religious minorities, whether Sikh, Christian, Muslim, or other. India's claims of secularism and democracy are suspect.

The rapes were reported to India's National Commission on Minorities, which referred the incident to the National Human Rights Commission. America will be watching closely to see how the Indian Government handles it.

All who love freedom must condemn this terrible incident. This offers one more reason for American taxpayers to be wary of supporting the questionable Indian government. We must maintain pressure on India until all the people of South Asia are free. We must support self-determination for all states throughout the subcontinent, including a free and fair vote in Punjab, Kashmir.

I am placing the Council of Khalistan's press release and articles on the rape into the RECORD.

[From the Council of Khalistan, Sept. 28, 1998]

FOUR NUNS RAPED IN INDIA

WASHINGTON.—Four nuns were raped in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh on September 23. The case was sent to the National Commission on Minorities, which referred it to the National Human Rights Commission.

"This rape was designed to threaten religious minorities and prevent anyone from objecting to the repression India practices against its religious and ethnic minorities," said Dr. Gurmit Singh Aulakh, President of the Council of Khalistan, the government pro tempore of Khalistan, the independent Sikh homeland declared independent on October 7, 1987. The Council of Khalistan leads the Sikh Nation's peaceful, democratic, non-violent movement for independence.

"Such ghastly crimes are a disgrace for the nation and make us hang our heads in shame," said Tahir Mahmood, chairman of the National Commission on Minorities.

"On behalf of the Sikh Nation, I extend our deepest sympathies to India's Christians and to the nuns who were raped for the political