

INTRODUCTION OF THE NATIONAL
INVASIVE SPECIES COUNCIL ACT**HON. VERNON J. EHLERS**

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 8, 2003

Mr. EHLERS. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing legislation to codify the Executive Order that established the Invasive Species Council and gave the Council responsibility for coordinating all invasive species activities across the Federal government (Executive Order #13112, issued in 1999). Invasive species, such as the snakehead fish and zebra mussel, cause an enormous economic, ecological and human health toll on the United States every year. There are over 20 different Federal agencies involved in prevention, eradication, control, monitoring, research and outreach efforts to deal with the threat of invasive species, and this Executive effort seeks to make these efforts more coordinated, effective and cost-efficient. Better management of invasive species efforts across Federal agencies is critical to an effective response to this threat, and the Executive Order was the right first step. However, it is only the first step. Congress now needs to pass this legislation to give the Council more authority to effectively meet this threat.

Since its inception, the Council has made progress in achieving its mandate. In particular, in 2001 the council issued the National Management Plan to provide a general blueprint of goals and actions for Federal agencies to better deal with invasive species. While this broad plan lacks detail in some areas, it is a good first step toward focusing the various Federal efforts on common goals and coordinated actions. In addition, the Council established a Federal advisory committee consisting of 32 members from a broad array of stakeholders. The advisory committee has met several times in order to provide guidance on the development of the National Management Plan and on Federal agency actions regarding invasive species in general.

While the Council has had some success, its authority to coordinate the actions of Federal agencies has been limited. The General Accounting Office (GAO) recently recognized this problem, stating that agencies did not incorporate the components of the National Management Plan into their annual performance plans. In addition, GAO recommended that the Council study whether or not a lack of legislative authority has hampered its mission. Key agencies of the Council have already recognized this lack of authority as problematic and have supported codification of the Council in testimony before a November 2002 joint hearing of the House Resources and House Science Committees on aquatic invasive species.

The legislation I am introducing today essentially keeps the existing structure of the Council intact, while at the same time it addresses issues raised by GAO by giving the Council a clear statutory mandate.

First, the legislation maintains the Executive Order's statement of administration policy that Federal agencies should not undertake actions that may lead to the introduction or further spread of invasive species without careful consideration of the costs that the proposed action may cause. The legislation requires that

the Council for Environmental Quality, in conjunction with the Council, issue guidelines for Federal agencies to help them consider the consequences of any proposed action. The intent of this provision is to create a common set of guidelines by which all Federal agencies can measure their actions, not to give individuals a private right of action against government agencies that take actions regarding invasive species.

Second, the legislation makes some modifications to the existing institutional structure of the Council. The membership of the Council will remain the same; however the legislation updates the membership, as described by the Executive Order, to reflect additional agencies that have been added since 1999. It also makes the Council an independent entity within the Executive Branch, to be chaired on a rotating basis by the Secretary of the Interior, the Secretary of Agriculture, and the Secretary of Commerce. This is a change from the Executive Order, which called for the Council to be housed within the Department of Interior and chaired by that agency. If the Council is to be a truly independent entity that can work with all Federal agencies, this change is necessary.

Third, the legislation retains the duties of the Council as described by the Executive Order (including development of an updated National Management Plan), but it adds some new duties in order to give the council more tools to use in coordinating Federal programs. In particular, the Council must submit an annual list of the top priorities in several different areas related to addressing the threat posed by invasive species. The legislation also specifically calls upon the Council to work with Federal agencies during the budget development and submission process in order to ensure that budget priorities reflect the priorities of the National Management Plan. The legislation also calls on the Office of Management and Budget to develop a crosscut budget of all invasive species efforts in the Federal government. This is a necessary tool for the Council to coordinate efforts among the various Federal agencies.

Finally, the legislation retains the existing Invasive Species Advisory Council to serve as an important contributor to the ongoing dialogue between the Federal government and stakeholders to ensure that the Federal government acts in the most effective way.

This legislation will help further the Federal government's efforts to combat invasive species, and I urge all of my colleagues to co-sponsor this important legislation.

BAN ON CONVERSIONS IN INDIA
SHOWS IT IS THEOCRACY, NOT
DEMOCRACY**HON. DAN BURTON**

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 8, 2003

Mr. BURTON of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, while we were in recess, a law was passed in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu by the Hindu fundamentalist government there that bans religious conversions to any religion but Hinduism. The Washington Times did an excellent report on this bill in its issue of November 11.

According to the article, the bill "penalizes those who convert to a religion other than Hinduism with imprisonment and a hefty fine." The ruling BJP and its coalition partners, as well as one of its sister organizations, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), have endorsed this bill and called for similar bills to be passed all over the country.

The militant Hindu nationalists claim that people are being converted by force. However, as John Dayal, secretary-general of the All-India Christian Council in New Delhi, said, "In fact, the only inducements by fraud and fear are those being carried out by [Hindu organizations] in the tribal belt, where innocent tribals are being forced to become Hindus." A Cabinet members was quoted several months ago as saying that everyone who lives in India must be a Hindu or be subservient to Hindus. This is the reality of Indian democracy, Mr. Speaker.

India must start acting like a democracy. 52,268 Sikhs political prisoners and tens of thousands of other political prisoners being held in India must be released. Since 1984, over 250,000 Sikhs have been murdered by the Indian government. The Indian regime has also killed over 85,000 Kashmiri Muslims since 1988, over 200,000 Christians in Nagaland, and tens of thousands of other minorities, including Assamese, Bodos, Dalits, Manipuris, and Tamils, among others. Last spring, 2,000 to 5,000 Muslims were murdered in Gujarat with the connivance and support of the police. In November, the government of Pakistan issued 400 visas to Sikhs to come and celebrate the birthday of one of the Sikh Gurus, Guru Nanak. India only let 48 Sikhs to the celebration.

Why are American taxpayers being asked to support this theocratic regime? It is time to cut off our aid to India, and it is time to support the American principles of freedom, democracy, peace, and stability by openly and publicly supporting self-determination for all the peoples and nations of South Asia, such as Khalistan, Kashmir, Nagalim, and others, through a free and fair plebiscite. This will show India's commitment to being a true democracy rather than a Hindu theocracy.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to place the Washington Times article on the anti-conversion ordinance into the RECORD at this time for the information of my colleagues.

[From the Washington Times, Nov. 11, 2002]

LOW-CASTE HINDUS EYE NEW RELIGIONS

(By Shaikh Azizur Rahman)

NEW DELHI.—Low-caste Hindus in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu are threatening to embrace Christianity, Buddhism or Islam to protest a new law that outlaws religious conversion.

A bill passed into law by the state legislature last month penalizes those who convert to a religion other than Hinduism with imprisonment and a hefty fine.

While religious minorities in Tamil Nadu plan to challenge the law in court, many Hindus from so-called "untouchable castes," known as Dalits, are threatening to publicly defy the new law.

One group of Dalit Hindus in the state capital, Chennai, said that a group of 10,000 will convert to Buddhism on Dec. 6 if the law is not revoked.

Another group, known as the Dalit Panthers of India (DPI), pledged that 25,000 of its members would become Christians to protest what they called an "unjustified" decree.

"The upper class has been torturing the Dalits for centuries, and now, by passing the