

them in educating parents and providing children the skills they need to swim safely and avoid harm.

SECRET PROGRAM TO SUPPLY
ARMS TO REBELS IN SYRIA

HON. RICHARD M. NOLAN

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 31, 2014

Mr. NOLAN. Mr. Speaker, I am deeply disappointed with the recent reporting of a new, covert, secret U.S. program—not secret to the intelligence communities throughout the world, but secret to the American people—to supply military weapons and equipment to arm the rebels in Syria.

Mr. Speaker, we've spent the last thirteen years sending arms into the Middle East, and now the region is blowing up.

I commend President Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry for their commitment to finding diplomatic solutions in preventing these wars and challenges—especially for their recent efforts to achieve an immediate ceasefire and settlement between Israelis and Palestinians.

However, I am deeply disturbed by these repeated undercover missions to fan the flames of foreign wars by inserting more military weapons and equipment into the conflicts. These efforts run contrary to our work of diplomacy and toward lasting peace—and what's more, are time and time again executed without seeking the Constitutionally-granted authority of the Congress of the United States.

I firmly believe that if the question were brought before the Congress, many of these programs would never be sanctioned.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, these are arms that all too often end up in the hands of our worst enemies. And this apparent determination on the part of the Administration to send weapons into so many regional conflicts only serves to escalate the violence, prolong the fighting, and stir feelings of ill will toward America.

Mr. Speaker, I've said this before—we have no friends in these fights.

We must get over the tired and fallacious notion that the enemies of our enemies are our friends.

I urge the Administration to remember that it is the Congress—not the President—that has authority over matters of war and peace.

I strongly urge my colleagues to remember our constitutional obligation to consider the future untold costs of these so-called wars of choice and nation-building abroad.

Those monies and resources are urgently needed here at home—in reducing the deficit, rebuilding America—creating good-paying jobs restoring our roads and bridges—and reinvesting in our people and our future by renewing our support for education, basic research in science, medicine, technology, and clean energy.

MEMBER ONLINE ALL-STAR
COMPETITION

HON. GREGORY W. MEEKS

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 31, 2014

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to have my office participate in the Democratic Whip Office's fifth annual "Member Online All-Star Competition." I applaud my colleagues for a friendly and spirited three week competition, and I congratulate the All-stars who led House Democrats in collectively acquiring over 213,000 new followers on social media.

I am always delighted to find new ways to engage my constituents and all Americans. To that end, my staff did an outstanding job making many new connections. I especially commend Ladan Ahmadi in my office for her tremendous effort to take us to the final round with our Vine video.

I thank the Democratic Whip for building on and fostering comity in the People's House. I know that we are all better off for it, and our work on the behalf of the American people is enhanced by it.

THE TROUBLING CASE OF MERIAM
IBRAHIM

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 31, 2014

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, for weeks this spring, the world watched as Meriam Ibrahim Ishag, a pregnant Christian woman in Sudan, faced flogging and the death penalty because her government would not accept that she had lived her life as a Christian and married a Christian man. Meriam has demonstrated both courage and grace under pressure—giving birth in jail in May while chained and caring for her two children, including her newborn, not only under restraints, but also without the normal amenities that any pregnant woman and nursing mother should expect.

The harsh application of Sharia law on non-Muslims was the trigger for a two-decade civil war in Sudan and the eventual secession of the South. Sudan is one of 20 countries in the world who have laws against apostasy—defined as the abandonment by an individual of their original religion. In Sudan, apostasy is effectively considered leaving the Muslim faith, particularly the interpretation of Islam followed by authorities. In Sudan, to leave the Muslim faith is an automatic death sentence. If you are considered an apostate, you cannot legally marry someone of another faith, and for this, Meriam also was charged with adultery and sentenced to flogging.

However, this story is not just about harshly applied religious and legal principles in violation of national and international law. Daniel Wani, Meriam's husband, is a Christian who is a dual American and South Sudanese citizen. He has lived in the United States for more than a decade. He married Meriam in late 2011, and they had a son a year later. Somehow, the U.S. Embassy in Khartoum could not find a way to help this American to get his family out of Sudan before a crisis developed,

even after she was arrested and released last year in charges involving apostasy.

A hearing that I recently convened was intended to examine the facts as we know them to determine how strictly applied rules almost led to the officially sanctioned beating and execution of a young woman who has lived as a Christian all her life, but who has now been told that she has no right to choose her religious belief.

This hearing was originally supposed to take place in June, but at the urging of both the U.S. Government and Sudanese officials, we postponed it to allow for quiet diplomacy to take place. However, prior to the hearing, Meriam's legal entanglements seem to be increasing rather than diminishing.

A Sudanese court initially ruled that the mere fact that her father was Muslim means that she should have been raised as a Muslim. She was given three days to convert to Islam, but she told authorities she would not abandon her Christian faith. Her refusal to leave the faith she had practiced her entire life led to her being in mortal fear for her life.

Fortunately, a Sudanese appeals court believed that she considered herself Christian and overturned her conviction on apostasy and adultery charges. However, members of her family have appealed the overturning of her conviction. Meanwhile, the Government of Sudan rearrested Meriam for using South Sudanese documents in an attempt to leave the country, and while she was released on bail. Fortunately, she was able to leave Sudan last week.

We cannot be absolutely certain of the exact chain of events that led to the situation that Meriam was in prior to her release. The Department of State understandably declined to testify last week because of the sensitive nature of the then ongoing efforts to end the matter satisfactorily. Daniel and Meriam were still in Sudan at that point. Daniel was free to leave with his children, but he chose, of course, to stay with his wife, until she too could leave with her family.

Since Meriam's conviction in May, a bipartisan, bicameral Congressional coalition worked to undo the harsh penalties for her under the apostasy and adultery laws and secure her family's repatriation to the United States. Contact was made with Daniel, as well as the U.S. Embassy in Khartoum and the Sudan embassy in Washington. Eventually, the headquarters offices of both the State Department and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services got involved.

Yet one wonders why this matter had to come to a crisis stage before a means could be found to avoid what now seems to have been an inevitable outcome in this case. Daniel told congressional staff that he sought help from the U.S. Embassy in Khartoum but was told that he should seek an attorney since the situation was mostly focused on his wife, who was not an American. This was the advice he received even when he was arrested and had his passport seized. An American citizen should expect more from his government's representatives in a foreign country when that country's government has taken action against them.

Under the principles of natural law, which are the basis of our governing documents and those of countries around the world, there are certain inalienable rights endowed by Our Creator. The decision on how to worship Our Creator is one of them.

Elements in Sudan's Islamic clergy and in the government interpret the Koran to give them license to tell people how they will live out their faith whether they consider themselves Muslim or not. In Meriam's case, her father has been absent from her life since she was a small child. Her Christian mother raised her as a Christian.

Sadly, Meriam is not the only Sudanese who chose differently on the matter of faith only to be faced with a death sentence for that choice. Sudanese civil activist Mahmud Muhammad Taha was arrested and charged with apostasy in 1984 for his efforts to end Sharia law in Sudan. He was subsequently executed.

In some countries, Christian converts have been forced to renounce their faith and conform to the version of Islam favored by the government of the day. Some of these countries have constitutions that ostensibly guarantee religious freedom even as they may also have laws that actually contradict those rights. Except for Malaysia, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, the other 15 countries including Sudan, have signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights guaranteeing freedoms for their citizens.

Article 18 of that document enshrines "the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion." Speaking of the rights of the individual, that article also forbids "coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice. Article 18 also guarantees "the freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching."

The current report by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, or USCIRF, cites Sudan as a "country of particular concern" due to its government engaging in "systematic, ongoing and egregious violations of freedom of religion or belief." According to USCIRF, Sudan is the world's most violent abuser of the right to freedom of religion or belief.

USCIRF's Zudhi Jasser recommended in his testimony that not only should the U.S. Government take appropriate actions against Sudan as detailed in the International Religious Freedom Act, but that our government should also make religious freedom and human rights a centerpiece of U.S.-Sudan bilateral relations.

The troubling case of Meriam Ibrahim Ishag should warn of future incidents in which those who do not believe in Islam as defined by a government are persecuted or placed in fear of death or torture.

THE RETIREMENT OF CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT WENDELL L. PEACOCK

HON. DOUG COLLINS

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 31, 2014

Mr. COLLINS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to recognize Chief Master Sergeant Wendell L. Peacock of the 94th Airlift Wing at Dobbins Air Reserve Base on the occasion of his retirement.

Chief Peacock enlisted in the Air Force in 1981 and served eight years of active duty before joining the Air Force Reserve. He has held various assignments in the security forces career field. In 2007, he moved to Dobbins Air Reserve Base as a Security Forces Manager. Chief Peacock became the Command Chief Master Sergeant for the 94th Airlift Wing at Dobbins in May 2011.

In this position, Chief Peacock has been the principal advisor to the commander and staff. He has been responsible for influencing mission readiness, utilization, morale, and quality of life for more than 1,600 enlisted Airmen. He has also coordinated with staff agencies and assists with the implementation of wing policies.

I had the privilege of working alongside Chief Peacock as a chaplain in the 94th Air Wing and had a close relationship with him. He exemplifies the very best traits that can be found among the ranks of our Armed Forces. I stand with many Airmen at Dobbins who will miss the Chief and wish him all the best in his retirement.

HONORING CELANESE CORPORATION AND HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

HON. SAM JOHNSON

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 31, 2014

Mr. SAM JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to ask my fellow colleagues to join me in thanking and congratulating Celanese Corporation as they celebrate their 10 year partnership with the South Collin County Habitat for Humanity.

Over the past decade, Celanese and Habitat have changed countless lives and have improved the future for families in our communities. In fact, since 2005, Celanese has donated over \$400,000 and over 7,500 volunteer hours towards building 10 Habitat for Humanity Homes. This year, almost 300 volunteers devoted 2,500 hours to complete a home for a family over 14 weekends. They must be proud of these accomplishments, I sure am.

When the strength of corporations and the hearts of volunteers come together the results are limitless. The noble work done by these two groups is to be commended and emulated by all.

A strong relationship between outstanding companies and selfless volunteer organizations is one of the fundamental building blocks of a safe and prosperous community. I thank all of those involved for their hard work, dedication, and promise of a brighter future for North Texans.

I look at the extraordinary accomplishments over the past 10 years, and can't help but look forward to the next 10 years. I'm confident that your hard-work, generosity, and compassion will continue to guide you and lead you to continued success.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating Celanese for their dedication to enhancing the lives of Collin County families. It is an honor and a privilege to represent the Celanese Corporation and its numerous employees in the United States Congress. God bless you. I salute you.

CONGRATULATING JOHN HANCOCK COLLEGE PREP HIGH SCHOOL ON THEIR AWARD AT THE 2014 MATE INTERNATIONAL REMOTELY OPERATED VEHICLE COMPETITION

HON. DANIEL LIPINSKI

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 31, 2014

Mr. LIPINSKI. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate John Hancock College Prep High School and their Underwater Robotics team on their award in the 2014 MATE International Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) Competition. I appreciate all of the hard work and dedication the team members have put in to build their ROV and would like to congratulate them on this tremendous accomplishment.

The Marine Advanced Technology Education (MATE) Center created the ROV competition in partnership with the Marine Technology Society ROV Committee to encourage students to excel in mathematics and science and to pursue careers in these fields. The MATE competition brings together K-12, community college, and university students from all over the world to design and build ROVs based on scenarios from the ocean workplace. In addition to engineering their ROVs, students were required to create technical reports and presentations to be delivered to competition judges.

In June, John Hancock College Prep High School traveled to Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary in Alpena, MI after advancing from the Midwest regional. In competition with 29 other teams, they were awarded the "Biggest Bang for Buck Award" in the Ranger category for spending the least amount of money on a vehicle that performed exceptionally. Their underwater ROV, the "Aquatic Eagle", was designed to be a low-cost option for shipwreck and science investigations, as well as for conservation efforts. It was equipped with a camera, four motors, two hooks, and flotation devices. This is the first year that John Hancock College Prep High School has competed in the MATE contest.

The team included Hancock seniors Irving Alamilla, Jesus Caballero, Vincent Calderon, and Marisol Ramirez as well as juniors Carlos Barrios, Ivan Lopez, and Jennifer Mondragon. Ms. Jennifer McConnell Stites, a science teacher at John Hancock College Prep, was a mentor to the team.

John Hancock College Prep High School is a high school focused on college preparation, community service, and leadership. The school opened in 1999 and is located in the Third Congressional District on the Southwest Side of Chicago.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating John Hancock College Prep High School on their remarkable achievement and I wish them the best in the future.

IN RECOGNITION OF RONALD W. WALKER

HON. STEPHEN LEE FINCHER

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 31, 2014

Mr. FINCHER. Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize Ronald W. Walker of Piperton, Tennessee. Today, Mr. Walker retires from the