

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 11, 2014

The Honorable Hal Rogers
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
H-305 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita M. Lowey
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Lowey,

We write to urge you to take action to once again extend the "Lautenberg Amendment," a critical lifeline for threatened religious minorities trapped in Iran. If the program is not renewed, Iranian religious minorities will be stranded in Iran, unable to access the protection of the United States. Congress included this provision in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014 and it was included in the Fiscal Year 2015 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations bill passed by your Committee in June. The extension must be included again in any continuing resolution to prevent a lapse that would place these persecuted religious minorities at great risk.

The Lautenberg Amendment, first enacted as part of the 1989 Foreign Operations Appropriations Bill, established a presumption of refugee eligibility for historically persecuted groups in the former Soviet Union and Southeast Asia. Since 2003, the Lautenberg Amendment has been expanded to cover Iranian religious minorities facing persecution.

Today, the provision is more necessary than ever as Iranian Jews, Christians, and Baha'is suffer systematic persecution and discrimination by the Iranian government. The State Department International Religious Freedom Report and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom have consistently designated Iran as a "Country of Particular Concern" for egregious ongoing and systematic violations of religious freedom, and last year's report states that "religious freedom in Iran deteriorated further from an already egregious situation." At a time when the Iranian regime continues its campaigns to demonize Jews and jail Baha'i leaders for their beliefs, the Lautenberg Amendment preserves a pathway to freedom that is a beacon of hope.

Without the safeguards provided by the Lautenberg Amendment, past experience has shown that safe transit countries like Austria would no longer be willing to provide visas to allow religious minorities to be processed on their soil. With no U.S. Embassy in Tehran, persecuted individuals would be forced to flee to dangerous neighboring countries such as Pakistan, where religious minorities also face grave danger.


current
10 Dem¹ Members of Judiciary
including Conyers, Lofgren, Cicilline (the amendment
sponsor)
Lutierrez, Nadler, and others.

We urge you to act in an expeditious manner to reauthorize the Lautenberg Amendment and thus preserve a safe and reliable mechanism for vulnerable religious minorities to escape harm's way.

Sincerely,


HENRY A. WAXMAN
Member of Congress


TRENT FRANKS
Member of Congress


ADAM B. SCHIFF
Member of Congress

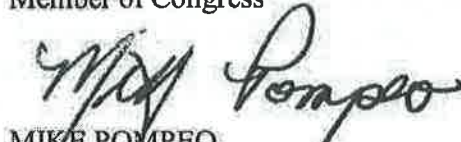

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Member of Congress

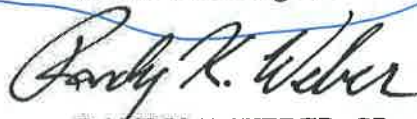

JOHN A. YARMUTH
Member of Congress

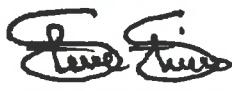

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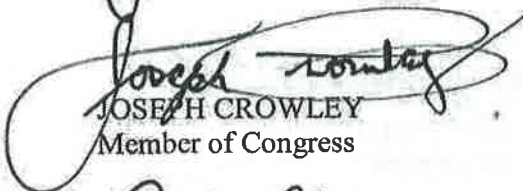
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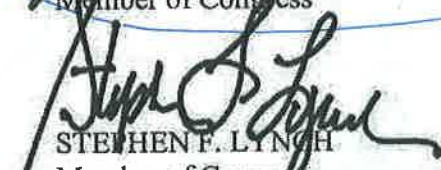

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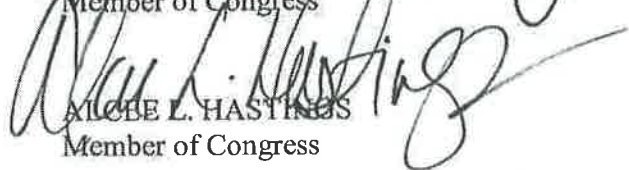

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