

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 25, 2010

The Honorable Barack H. Obama
President of the United States of America
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. President,

We write as members of Congress to urge you to appoint an Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom. As you know, the United States stands as a beacon of religious freedom to the world for our historical commitment to this fundamental expression of human freedom. Given our unique experience with religious freedom, in 1998 Congress passed bi-partisan legislation that affirmed the universal recognition of this right and made its promotion and protection a priority in our nation's foreign policy. Congress recognized that

The right to freedom of religion undergirds the very origin and existence of the United States. Many of our Nation's founders fled religious persecution abroad, cherishing in their hearts and minds the ideal of religious freedom. They established in law, as a fundamental right and as a pillar of our Nation, the right to freedom of religion. From its birth to this day, the United States has prized this legacy of religious freedom and honored this heritage by standing for religious freedom and offering refuge to those suffering religious persecution.

The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA) called for the appointment of an Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom who would serve as a "principal adviser to the President and Secretary of State." The legislation calls for the Ambassador to have the primary responsibility for advancing religious freedom as internationally accepted abroad, denouncing violations of this right, and recommending appropriate responses for the U.S. government to take in order to secure this freedom.

Former Ambassadors worked with several countries, including Vietnam and Saudi Arabia, to improve laws and conditions specifically affecting religious freedom while also working to end policies that would limit religious freedom. They worked with our embassies abroad and foreign governments to negotiate the release of people imprisoned for their religious beliefs, and they sought justice for the victims of religious persecution.

As you rightly stated in Cairo last year, "People in every country should be free to choose and live their faith based upon the persuasion of the mind and the heart and the soul." Yet, the millions of people living in the world without the most basic right to do these things, who are often persecuted for trying to exercise these freedoms, look to the United States for leadership. Our voice is critical for those who have none, which is why the need for an Ambassador is so urgent.

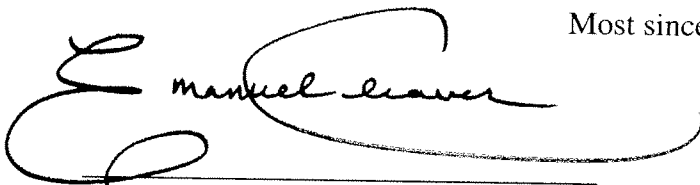
As members of the bi-partisan International Religious Freedom Caucus, we strongly believe that the promotion of this fundamental human right will lead to greater human freedom, economic prosperity, and security throughout the world. Therefore, we strongly urge you to appoint as soon as possible a qualified person who has a proven commitment to the promotion of this issue and skills in international diplomacy to fill the role of Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom.

Under past administrations, the Office of International Religious Freedom has been limited in its ability to directly advise the President and Secretary of State by its placement within the Department of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor – a status inconsistent with that of other similar offices, such as the Trafficking and Global Women’s Issues offices. While we greatly appreciate the excellent work of Michael Posner, Assistant Secretary for the Department of Human Rights, Democracy and Labor, in addressing this issue since his appointment, we are concerned that the mandate established in IRFA cannot be fully addressed without an Ambassador at Large wholly dedicated to leading the Office of International Religious Freedom and serving as a principal adviser to the President and Secretary of State.

We commend you for requesting a sufficient budget for the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and we hope you will work with the Secretary of State to ensure that the Office of International Religious Freedom, given its extensive mandate, also has a more robust budget in order to best fulfill the mandate of the Office and reflect the critical role of religious freedom in U.S. foreign policy.

Thank you for your attention to this letter and we look forward to working with you and the Ambassador at Large that you will appoint on religious freedom in the near future.

Most sincerely,



Emanuel Cleaver, II



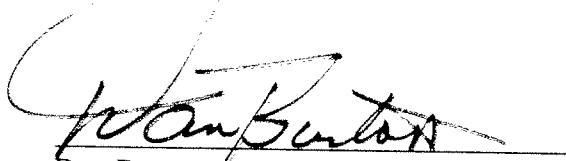
Trent Franks



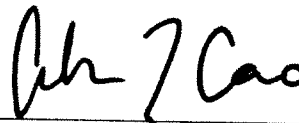
Michele Bachmann




Gus M. Bilirakis

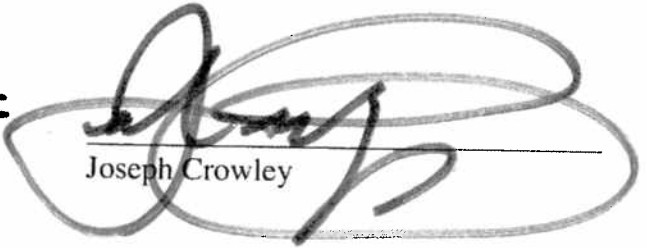


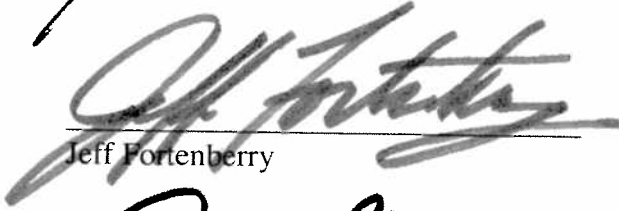
Dan Burton

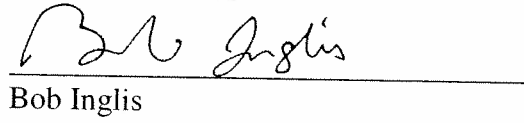


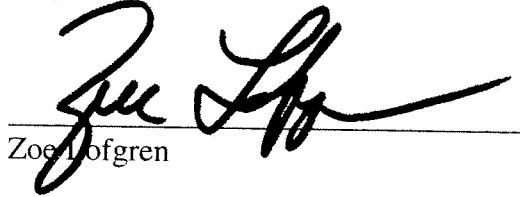
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Donna Christensen

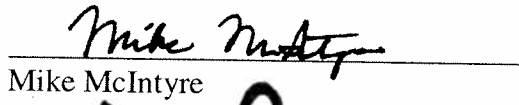

Joseph Crowley


Jeff Fortenberry

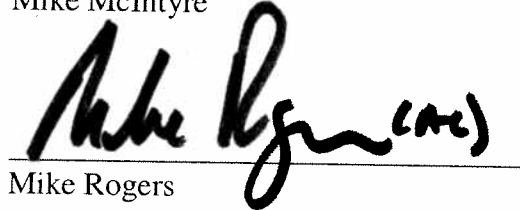

Bob Inglis


Zoe Lofgren

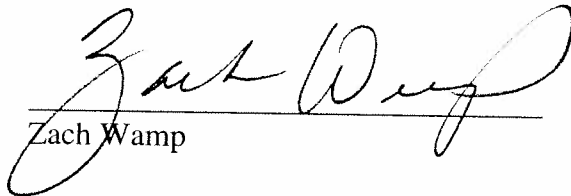

Thaddeus G. McCotter

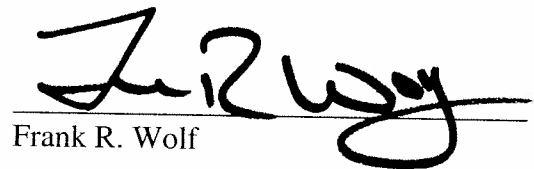

Mike McIntyre


Joseph R. Pitts


Mike Rogers


Chris Smith


Zach Wamp


Frank R. Wolf

Cc: The Honorable Hillary Clinton, Secretary of State