

other Federal employees. It is simply unacceptable for a Federal agency charged with promoting human rights to argue that it has the legal right to discriminate against its employees. The Durbin amendment includes in H.R. 2867 a provision which allows pending civil rights claims against USCIRF to proceed under the Congressional Accountability Act.

The House-passed version of H.R. 2867 provided antidiscrimination protections to USCIRF employees for future incidents of discrimination through the Congressional Accountability Act. However, I was concerned that this provision did not apply to former employees or past discrimination. As a result, there would have been no legal remedy for any incidents of discrimination that may have taken place prior to enactment of H.R. 2867.

Specifically, last year a former USCIRF employee filed a discrimination claim based on her allegation that her permanent employment offer was rescinded after the Commissioners learned of her prior job with a Muslim civil rights organization. Though she subsequently received a temporary contract with USCIRF, she claims she was terminated when she filed her discrimination claim. The Commission argued that it is not subject to title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The case is now on appeal.

There must be some avenue for resolving—on the merits—past allegations that USCIRF discriminated against its employees. Accordingly, my amendment to H.R. 2867 provides that pending civil rights claims against USCIRF may proceed under the Congressional Accountability Act.

The House-passed version of H.R. 2867 reduced the number of Commissioners from nine to five, which would make it more difficult for USCIRF to carry out its mission. Moreover, the bill accomplished this reduction in a disproportionate fashion by reducing the number of Commissioners appointed by the President from three to one. The Durbin amendment strikes the provision from H.R. 2867 which reduces the number of Commissioners from nine to five.

Religious freedom advocates allege that some USCIRF Commissioners have traveled first class and stayed in five-star hotels, in violation of Federal travel regulations. This is deeply troubling, particularly during a time when all Federal agencies are being asked to do more with less. The Durbin amendment simply clarifies that USCIRF Commissioners are subject to Federal travel regulations, like other Federal employees.

H.R. 2867 reauthorizes USCIRF until September 30, 2013. With the good-government reforms in the Durbin amendment, it would be more appropriate to reauthorize USCIRF until September 30, 2014, so that USCIRF Commissioners and staff have more certainty about the future of the Commission.

I strongly support the mission of the U.S. Commission on International Reli-

gious Freedom, but I have been deeply troubled by allegations of misconduct, misuse of funds, and discrimination at the Commission. For example, according to the Washington Post:

Some past commissioners, staff and former staff of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom say the agency charged with advising the president and Congress is rife, behind-the-scenes, with ideology and tribalism, with commissioners focusing on pet projects that are often based on their own religious background. In particular, they say an anti-Muslim bias runs through the commission's work. . . . Rumors about infighting and ineffectiveness have swirled for years around the commission.

My amendment will make good-government reforms to USCIRF that should help to address the concerns that have been raised about USCIRF. Moreover, my amendment will make USCIRF stronger by increasing the number of Commissioners in the reauthorization bill from five to nine and by extending the reauthorization from 2 to 3 years. As chairman of the Judiciary Committee's Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights Subcommittee and a member of the Appropriations Subcommittee on the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, I will closely monitor the work of the USCIRF in the coming months and years to ensure that it is functioning in a transparent fashion and effectively performing its mission of promoting and protecting international religious freedom.

I urge my colleagues in the House of Representatives to quickly take up and pass H.R. 2867 so that the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom can be reauthorized.

TRIBUTE TO SPECIALIST JOHN O. BERRY, JR.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I stand today to honor an outstanding Kentucky hero and patriot, SPC John O. Berry, Jr. SPC Berry is a veteran of the Vietnam war who has received numerous awards and commendations for his heroism and bravery in serving his country.

John O. Berry, Jr., of Wayne County, KY, grew up a typical kid—he spent his time hanging out with friends, listening to music, and enjoying time spent with his brothers and sisters. On September 18, 1968, however, John answered a call to duty, and his life was forever changed when he joined the U.S. Army.

John received his introduction to the Army and basic training at Fort Knox, KY, before being sent to Fort Leonard Wood, MO, to complete his advanced training. Four short months later, John had achieved the honor of combat demolition specialist with Company A, 299th Engineer Battalion, and was sent to a fire base in North Vietnam.

John's job was especially dangerous. He was responsible for ensuring the roads were free of the many deadly land mines that were strategically placed by the Viet Cong. Although

scores of Americans were killed by these mines, John and other courageous demolition engineers were responsible for saving thousands of additional lives by dismantling the mines throughout the war.

Over the years John has received many distinguished awards and honors for his bravery and service to our country. Included in these honors are two Purple Hearts, two Army Commendation Medals for heroism and exceptionally meritorious achievement in the Republic of Vietnam, two National Defense medals, and the Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm, which was awarded by the Republic of Vietnam to those who display valor and heroic conduct in combat.

These awards only represent a small portion of the gratitude we owe John for his selflessness and courage. According to the Department of the Army's account of a rescue mission in which John's unit was sent to aid an ambushed team, "John distinguished himself by exceptionally valorous action. . . . He demonstrated admirable courage and devotion to duty as he unflinchingly performed his task without regard to personal safety. His actions were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit and the United States Army."

Mr. President, I would ask that my Senate colleagues join me in thanking SPC John O. Berry, Jr. for his sacrifice and service. John's heroism is truly inspiring, and the people of our great Commonwealth are grateful for his selflessness and service. The Wayne County Outlook recently published an article thanking Specialist Berry and highlighting his accomplishments. I ask unanimous consent that the full article be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD as follows:

[From the Wayne County Outlook, Nov. 9, 2011]

BERRY RECEIVED MEDALS FOR SERVICE TO HIS COUNTRY

(By Harlan Ogle)

Here's the way the Department of the Army tells the story: He "distinguished himself by exceptionally valorous action . . . while serving as a member of a reactionary force sent to aid the mine sweep team which had been ambushed. . . . When he and other members of the reaction force dismounted their vehicle they immediately came under heavy enemy fire. With complete disregard for his own safety, [he] formed one line with the other members of the force and moved towards the front. He and the others laid down a base of fire which enabled the trapped mine sweep to break contact. The reaction force then advanced still further into the kill zone to continue firing while Delta Company's casualties were carried out. [He] demonstrated admirable courage and devotion to duty as he unflinchingly performed his tasks without regard to his personal safety. His cool-headedness in the face of conditions which would unnerve a weaker man served to inspire his comrades to follow suit. [His] actions were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit and the United States Army."

Could these words be a description of the bravery demonstrated by such heroes as Sergeant Alvin York, who is probably the most recognized veteran of World War I? Maybe these words describe Audie Murphy, the most decorated American of World War II?

No!

These words describe the man who could be Wayne County's most decorated soldier of the Vietnam War.

These are words that depict the extreme bravery of a veteran who still lives in our midst. These words describe one of our country's real heroes.

These are words contained in General Order 847 that officially awarded the Army Commendation Medal for Heroism to John O. Berry, Jr., who presently lives in the Gap of the Ridge community of Wayne County. John is the son of Willie Lee (Sloan) Berry and Johnny Berry.

He spent his childhood as most any other boy would—going to school, hanging out with his friends, listening to music, growing up with his brothers and sisters: Ted, Fred, George, Stella, Mae, Maggie, and Alene, and just generally enjoying life.

Until.

Until September 18, 1968. That's when John became a soldier in Uncle Sam's Army.

He took his basic training at Fort Knox and advanced training at Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri. Just four short months after entering the Army, he was sent to a fire base in North Vietnam.

He had become a combat demolition specialist with Company A, 299th Engineer Battalion.

His was a dangerous job because he had the responsibility of clearing the roads of the deadly mines placed by the Viet Cong.

Thousands of American service men were killed by these mines. However, because of the sacrifice and courage of soldiers like John O. Berry, Jr., thousands of lives were saved as these demolition engineers dismantled the mines.

Specialist Four John O. Berry, Jr., served his country with dedication and commitment. That service was continually recognized as he received numerous awards and commendations. Some of those distinguished awards include:

—Two Purple Hearts (a combat decoration awarded to members of the Armed Forces who are wounded by an instrument of war in the hands of the enemy).

—An Army Commendation Medal with first oak leaf cluster "for exceptionally meritorious achievement in support of the United States's objectives in the counterinsurgency effort in the Republic of Vietnam Through his outstanding professional competence and devotion to duty he consistently obtained superior results. Working long and arduous hours, he set an example that inspired his associates to strive for maximum achievement. The loyalty, initiative and will to succeed that he demonstrated at all times materially contributed to the successful accomplishment of the mission of this command."

—A second Army Commendation Medal with "V" device "for heroism in the Republic of Vietnam" distinguishing himself by meritorious achievement and service.

—Two National Defense medals.

—Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross w/ Palm awarded by the Vietnam Government to military personnel who have accomplished deeds of valor and displayed heroic conduct while fighting the enemy.

Eventually John was discharged from the Army, and when he returned to Monticello,

he continued serving his country by joining the local National Guard.

Today, John lives in the Gap of the Ridge community and walks among us as one of our nation's heroes. More especially, John is one of Wayne County's heroes!

He shares that role with two of his brothers who also served in the military during the Vietnam War: Ted in the Navy and Fred in the Army.

A grateful community proudly recognizes John O. Berry, Jr., and salutes him and all the other men and women who have sacrificed more than the average citizen will ever know.

Specialist Four John O. Berry, Jr., we salute you and thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your service to our country!

On Veterans Day 2011, we pray that you will be able to accept the fact that you are, indeed, an American hero!

You are our hero!

TRIBUTE TO HELEN HIERONYMUS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I stand today to pay tribute to an exceptional Kentuckian, Helen Hieronymus of Somerset, KY. Helen, who recently celebrated her 85th birthday, has lived a full and successful life and still exhibits youthfulness far beyond her years.

On October 20, 2011, her birthday, Helen decided to celebrate in a rather unconventional way—she went skydiving. For those who know her, however, her great leap wasn't all that surprising. Over the years, Helen has been a vibrant member of the local community—she has served as director of the local United Way, Cub Scout den mother, and president of the Junior Women's Club, all while always entertaining her adventurous appetite. Her travels have taken her fishing in Alaska, to the Great Wall of China, and to 80 different countries around the world.

Going skydiving has been an unfulfilled desire of Helen's for many years. As a child, Helen dreamed of being able to fly. Then, about 9 years ago, Helen was further inspired after witnessing a collection of paratroopers make their way to the ground while on a trip to Paris. "I thought it would be fun," she says. And so it was.

After ascending to 12,000 feet, Helen successfully completed a tandem jump followed by a safe landing. "No problem at all," she explained. "When you come out of the plane, you do a free fall. You see the earth below you, and it's amazing down there. I would do it again."

Mr. President, Ms. Helen Hieronymus is a courageous woman who has experienced a lifetime of excitement and fulfillment. Helen's community involvement and adventurous spirit serve as an inspiration to Kentuckians everywhere, and it is my hope that she have many more adventures to come. The Commonwealth Journal, a Somerset-area publication, recently published an article highlighting Helen's life of journeys and daring parachute jump. I ask unanimous consent that the full article be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Commonwealth Journal, Oct. 30, 2011]

SOMERSET WOMAN CELEBRATES 85TH BIRTHDAY BY TAKING PLUNGE OUT OF AN AIRPLANE

(By Chris Harris)

How does a woman who has traveled the world, ripped the roadway on a Harley, and hunted big game celebrate her 85th birthday?

By jumping out of an airplane, naturally.

Helen Hieronymus has lived a big life, no question about it. Her name is familiar to many in Pulaski County, having touched the community in many different ways—director of the local United Way, Cub Scout den mother, president of the Junior Women's Club, and so much more.

You could say she's lived a full life . . . yet she's always looking for ways to make it even more full.

"Of course," said Hieronymus. "Why waste it?"

Hieronymus turned 85 on October 20. She had a yen to try her hand at skydiving.

Why?

"God only knows," quipped her daughter, Janie Hail, known to many Somerset High School alumni as their former English teacher, now retired. "Mine was the voice in the background saying, Mother, are you sure you want to do this?"

In actuality, Hieronymus was inspired by a trip to Paris, France, about nine years ago, where she witnessed a collection of paratroopers descend to the earth from three different heights, landing in a circle.

Hieronymus's reaction? "I thought that would be fun."

In fairness, Hieronymus had dreamed of being able to fly since she was only a child. Of course, she was smart enough not to try it herself without a little experimentation first.

"I tried to teach my brother to fly by tying a sheet to his ankles and wrists and having him jump off the porch railing," she recalled. "I was just testing it in that one (case)."

By the time she reached her 85th birthday, she'd done nearly everything else. Hieronymus reported having done a "bit of traveling." That's only if you consider visiting 80 different countries to be "a bit." She's fished in Alaska, hunted wild beasts in the field, and walked on the Great Wall of China. Even recently, friend Tommy Cate took her for a ride on a Harley-Davidson motorcycle.

Hieronymus kept her adventurous spirit her whole life, but wasn't able to fully explore it until years down the road.

"I had responsibilities to take care of, like three children and a husband and things like that," she said. "Now they're big enough to take care of themselves."

Flying like a bird in the air, however, continued to elude her. Hieronymus had mentioned to her granddaughter that she would like to do a parachute jump. As a result, all of her grandchildren decided to chip in and buy "Granny" an opportunity to "jump out of a perfectly good airplane," as Hail put it.

Hail wasn't a fan of the idea. She constantly tried to talk her mother out of the idea, given the danger that falling to earth from 12,000 feet in the air could present.

"I'd think I had her talked out of it, but then it would come up again," said Hail, who