

numbering roughly 8-10 million, are leaving in droves. And the Middle East is far from being the exception. Persecution is on the rise. The International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church was earlier this month. Given the picture I just painted, one would think the church in the West would be galvanized. But how many churches marked this occasion with even a passing mention? If the faith community isn't engaged are we surprised when our government leaders turn a blind eye to matters of religious freedom?

Consider the following: Bipartisan legislation to create a Special Envoy position at the State Department charged with advocating on behalf of religious minorities in the Middle East and South Central Asia overwhelmingly passed the House a year and a half ago. But it has remained stalled in the Senate as a result of State Department opposition and the refusal of Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry, rumored to be in the running for Secretary of State or Defense, to even hold a hearing on the legislation.

Day in, day out I have the privilege of meeting individuals who boldly follow Jesus despite unbelievably hostile circumstances. Shabbaz Bhatti, Pakistan's Federal Minister for Minority Affairs, and the only Christian Member of the cabinet and an outspoken critic of his country's blasphemy laws, was one such man. On March 2, 2011 he was murdered, his car riddled with bullets, leaving his mother's house for work. In a video filmed shortly before his assassination, Bhatti appears to sense that the path he has chosen will come with a price.

When asked about the threats against his life, he said, without malice or fear, "I believe in Jesus Christ who has given his own life for us. I know what is the meaning of [the] cross. And I am following the cross. And I am ready to die for a cause." And so he did.

The book of Proverbs tells us to "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves. . . ." Bhatti can no longer speak. The Chinese bishop under house arrest cannot speak. The North Korean enslaved in the gulag cannot speak. The Iraqi nun fearing for her life cannot speak.

Will we be their voice? Martin Luther King famously said, "In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends." Are we not their friends?

America's Founding Fathers grounded our own experiment in self-governance in the notion that liberty comes from God and that all human life is sacred. As part of this equation, religious freedom was the "first freedom." The ideas set forth in Philadelphia on that hot summer day were simultaneously ancient and revolutionary—they are grounded in historic Judeo-Christian teachings.

Nearly 25 years ago these very ideas were a source of inspiration to the democracy marchers in Tiananmen Square. Ronald Reagan famously spoke of our founding documents as a covenant we made with the world—a promise that transcended time and place. I fear that covenant is in jeopardy.

America's influence is waning. Our once "shining city" appears dim. And we have lost our voice on behalf of the oppressed. And yet, dissidents still seek refuge in our embassies, the persecuted seek safe haven on our shores. To them the promise of American

exceptionalism is no mere philosophical debate; it is the difference between life and death. They cling to the promise even as our own leaders have abandoned it. And so, seeking to preserve that covenant that Reagan envisioned, it falls to men and women of faith to carry the torch—to pray, to advocate, to act.

HONORING JAY PIERSON ON HIS
RETIREMENT FROM THE HOUSE
OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH OF

HON. JOHN L. MICA

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, December 18, 2012

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to pay tribute to Jay Pierson and his 34 years of dedicated service to the House of Representatives. I have had the privilege of serving in this institution since 1992 and for all of those years I have served with Jay. During that time I have come to know him for his graciousness, patience and helpful nature. His historical expertise and institutional knowledge will sorely be missed.

I would like to thank Jay for his friendship and wish him the best in his retirement. We have all been better served because of his commitment to the House of Representatives and the American people.

The American people will never know the work of individuals like Jay Pierson, who has toiled long hours making certain the Congress and U.S. House function every day for our federal legislative branch.

I especially want to thank Jay who has stayed many nights with me, often until midnight and long after the House had completed its regular business, while I presented my special orders speeches.

The United States House of Representatives will hold a better place in history because of Jay's dedication and long tenure.

HONORING THE LIFE AND SERVICE
OF MR. PAT NEFF GRONER

HON. JEFF MILLER

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 20, 2012

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Groner's roots trace back to Marshall, Texas, where he was the youngest of five siblings. He attended the College of Marshall and graduated from Baylor University. He then joined the United States Marine Corps, and while stationed in Vermont, he met his wife Louise, or as Mr. Groner proclaimed "the prettiest girl in Vermont". Shortly after their marriage, Mr. Groner served with honor and distinction as a pilot in the South Pacific Theatre during World War II. Upon his return, Mr. Groner joined the Vermont Air National Guard and interned at a

Vermont hospital. As a boy, Mr. Groner's father instilled in him the belief that health care is a profession closely connected with faith, and in addition to his passion for flying, his care for others and faith in God never faded.

When Baptist Hospital in Pensacola, Florida was in need of leadership, Pat Groner answered the call, and, along with his wife and their daughter Jodee, moved to Florida. As CEO of Baptist Healthcare, Mr. Groner implemented numerous programs that are now standard operating procedure in hospitals across the country. Baptist Hospital had the first post-operative recovery room in Florida and was one of the first hospitals in the nation to have an intensive coronary care unit, an outpatient surgical care unit, and Life Flight. During his time at Baptist, Mr. Groner also envisioned a place where seniors could enjoy the advantages of a resort lifestyle coupled with quality amenities, services, and health care and the perfect location. Despite working full-time as CEO, Mr. Groner was dedicated to bringing this vision to fruition, and under his leadership, the Pensacola retirement community, Azalea Trace, opened in 1980. Today, it remains a first-class and well-respected adult retirement community.

In addition to his leadership in the American Hospital Association, the Southeastern Hospital Conference, and the American College of Healthcare Executives, Mr. Groner was co-founder and president of the Hospital Research and Development Institute, co-founder of the Voluntary Hospitals of America, Vice-President and Treasurer of Multi-Hospital Insurance Group, and long-time board member for Blue Cross-Blue Shield of Florida. Outside of his contributions to the health care profession, Mr. Groner had an unwavering commitment to serve his community through the March of Dimes, YMCA, Community Mental Health Center, Pensacola Rotary Club, Action 76 Taskforce on Higher Education, Fiesta of Five Flags, and various United Fund organizations. Mr. Groner also had a special interest in education and the State university system, where he served as a member of the Florida Board of Regents.

Mr. Groner's contributions to healthcare and the Northwest Florida community are exemplified by the copious honors and awards bestowed on him. Among his many honors, Mr. Groner was inducted into the Health Care Hall of Fame by the American College of Health Care Executives. He was also awarded the Kiwanis Man of the Year Award, Pensacola Junior Chamber of Commerce Good Government Award, Pensacola Chamber of Commerce Pioneer Award, Freedom Foundation George Washington Medal, and Liberty Bell Award.

There is no question that in his 33 year career as CEO and his many years serving our community, Mr. Groner has made an everlasting impact on Northwest Florida and on the health care profession. To some, Mr. Groner will be remembered as courageous pilot who answered the call of duty during one of our nation's most trying times or as pilot of the