

Mr. Speaker: I rise to oppose yet another of our misguided foreign policy initiatives. Of course none of us favors religious persecution, here or abroad, but how would we feel if Iran, Israel, Afghanistan, or Iraq – all targeted by this bill -- sent a government representative here to dictate what our government policies toward religious minorities should be? In many parts of the world certain religious institutions are financed by the state. How would we feel if foreign governments demanded that we abide by such practices? In short, it is arrogant and counterproductive to attempt to impose our values – which we sadly do not always live up to – onto nations overseas. I certainly believe that people should have the right to worship as they wish without government interference, but it would be far better for us to lead the rest of the world by example than by the implied force of a “special envoy.”

Finally, I find it disturbing but sadly telling that on the day we are debating our dire fiscal condition and contemplating the implications of reaching the debt ceiling we nevertheless do not hesitate to obligate taxpayer dollars to fund yet another new boondoggle overseas. This bill will spend another million dollars per year for the special envoy and his staff to travel throughout the Middle East and South Central Asia lecturing foreign governments on religious policy. What a waste.