

Mr. Speaker, it has now been 5 years since the International Religious Freedom Act was signed into law, and our view of the world has changed very dramatically since then due to a number of factors, primarily September 11 and the war against terrorism. The fundamental right of religious freedom is one of the very most critical foundations of this Republic.

Mr. Speaker, we must never forget that our Nation was founded by those who fled their country to preserve the inalienable right to religious liberty; and throughout the history of our Nation, people have left their homes in the cover of night to escape to the United States due to the religious persecution in their own countries. Unfortunately, in many places in the world today, the right to choose and practice one's faith is still not protected.

Mr. Speaker, it is so vitally imperative that we as a Nation continue to work to eliminate violations of religious freedom and human rights. One of the most compelling and pressing issues at this moment, and one where we have a great deal of leverage, is our responsibility to help establish true freedom in Afghanistan and Iraq. True freedom in those nations is absolutely impossible apart from provisions in their new constitutions that absolutely guarantee full religious freedom for every one of their people.

Our principal efforts in those countries, if we do nothing else, must center on preserving the right of religious freedom for every individual. It is critical, Mr. Speaker, even to the war on terrorism because constitutionally guaranteed religious freedom creates a vital framework for discussion and debate. It has the power to turn the war of weapons into a war of words. May we not forget that critical truth.

Mr. Speaker, Patrick Henry stated it this way. He said, "I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided, and that is the lamp of experience. I know of no way of judging the future but by the past." He understood the urgency and nature of the battle when he declared, "There is no longer any room for hope. If we wish to be free, if we mean to preserve inviolate those inestimable privileges for which we have been so long engaged, and which we have pledged ourselves never to abandon until the glorious object of our contest shall be obtained, we must fight!"

Mr. Speaker, indeed, we have fought but we now must ask ourselves what it was we were truly fighting for. I believe we fought, as President Bush said, for the "advance of freedom" because "we believe that freedom, the freedom we prize, is not for us alone; it is the right and capacity of all mankind." Guided by the lamp of our own experience of our own Nation, in those words, the President makes the most compelling argument that I can imagine for the United States to renew its commitment to eliminating violations of the right to religious freedom and to protecting fundamental human rights for every human being across the world.