

February 11, 2013

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C.

Dear Senator McConnell:

I am requesting I be consulted before the Senate enters into any unanimous consent agreements or time limitations regarding S. 653, the Near East and South Central Asia Religious Freedom Act of 2013.

S. 653 establishes a Special Envoy position at the Department of State to promote the freedom of religious minorities in the Middle East and South Central Asia regions. The legislation's sponsors and supporters hope that the passage of this bill will bring increased attention to the Administration's continued failure to advocate and act against persecution of religious minorities in those regions. While I share my colleague's deep concern that Christians and other religious minorities in these countries and worldwide have been the target of violence and discrimination, I do not believe this legislation is necessary or likely to change the way this Administration prioritizes its activities.

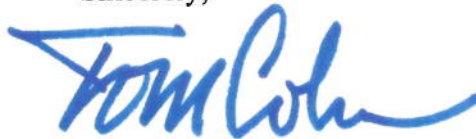
The Special Envoy position created by this legislation duplicates the existing Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom established by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) of 1998. As established by IRFA, the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom is responsible for advancing the right to freedom of religion abroad by representing the U.S. in all matters related to religious freedom worldwide, reporting on and denouncing violations of that right, and recommending appropriate responses by the United States Government to violations of this right—the same functions with which the Special Envoy position created by S. 653 would be charged.

With the best of intentions, Congress continually passes unnecessary legislation to address implementation failures that instead of increasing accountability, only succeed in creating new layers of bureaucracy and adding to our federal debt. While the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom position has been vacant for the past few months, the creation of this duplicative position will ultimately do nothing to hold the Administration accountable for its continued failure to fulfill the legal mission established under IRFA and our moral obligations to support freedom for religious minorities worldwide, as the bill's supporters intend. Instead of creating a new position to do the job of another that is failing, to which the President need never nominate someone to fill the new

position, we should hold the Administration and the Department of State directly accountable for their failure to execute on the expressed intent of Congress and the law of the land.

Thank you for protecting my rights on this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tom Coburn". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent horizontal stroke at the beginning.

Tom A. Coburn, M.D.
United States Senator