

Congress' Religious Freedom Champion Won't Seek Re-Election

Rep. Frank Wolf, one of the loudest and most persistent voices in **Congress** for the right of people around the globe to practice their religions freely, will not seek an 18th term.

"As a follower of Jesus, I am called to work for justice and reconciliation, and to be an advocate for those who cannot speak for themselves," Wolf, a Presbyterian, said in a statement Tuesday.

The Republican from Northern Virginia, who will turn 75 in January, said he will work on human rights, religious freedom and other social issues in his retirement.

"The cause of **religious freedom** has no better friend in Congress than Frank Wolf and his stepping down will leave a gaping vacuum," said Nina Shea, an international human rights lawyer with the Hudson Institute.

During his 33 years in Congress Wolf called out China for religious oppression, Iran for persecuting Baha'is and Egypt for failing to protect **Coptic Christians**. He worked, unsuccessfully, to deny China "most favored nation" trade status for its suppression of religious and other human rights, and co-chairs the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission and the Religious Minorities in the Middle East Caucus.

As the lead sponsor of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, Wolf helped create three entities to help safeguard religious freedoms abroad: the independent U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, an ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom within the State Department, and a special adviser on international religious freedom

within the National Security Council.

Shea noted other accomplishments: “He set in motion the diplomacy that ended the North-South conflict in Sudan. He visited and brought hope to Soviet Jews in Siberian prisons. He remains a passionate and tireless defender of those persecuted for religious reasons today—whether Tibetan Buddhists or Syrian Christians.”

“He took up this mission regardless of how many votes it might gain, or cost, him,” she said.

“My passion for these issues has been influenced by the examples of President Ronald Reagan, former Congressmen Jack Kemp and Tony Hall, Chuck Colson, and the life of 18th-century Member of Parliament William Wilberforce,” Wolf said in his statement.

Wolf, a married father of five, is considered a moderate Republican, but a social conservative, and no friend to those pursuing marriage equality, abortion rights and gun control. He signed the Manhattan Declaration, a statement in opposition to abortion and gay marriage and in support of religious freedom. The National Rifle Association gives him a B+ grade.

Wolf also voted to give the president in 2002 the power to attack Iraq.

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