

Madam Speaker, I believe the cornerstone of all human freedom is that of religious freedom. Indeed, a small separatist church congregation in England possessed a desire so strong to practice their faith freely that it compelled them to cross the ocean in a little wooden ship called the Mayflower.

While theirs was a quest to be able to practice the faith of Christianity, a central tenet of their Christian faith was the belief that all human beings were given the right by God to embrace whatever religious conviction they truly held in their hearts, and that human beings should protect that right for each other.

Madam Speaker, today we considered and passed H. Res. 847, "recognizing the importance of Christmas and the Christian faith." Of course, Madam Speaker, there will be those who will criticize any effort to recognize a particular faith or holiday. However, Madam Speaker, aside from the debatable aspects of this resolution, or any other, those who are even slightly acquainted with history know that the Bible, the founding document of the Christian faith, was the essential rationale and substance that inspired our Declaration of Independence and was, further, the bedrock foundational document of the Western world.

The objective of this resolution is to honor those Judeo-Christian principles that have shaped American history and policy since the founding of our Nation and that have informed and influenced our ideas of justice and equality 7 years into the 21st century. Indeed, Madam Speaker, it was the Christian principles hailed in this resolution that led our country to be the very first beacon of religious freedom in the history of the world and, further, to finally reject the practice of human slavery that had plagued civilization across the world for nearly 7,000 years.

Madam Speaker, I believe that it would be wrong for this body to ever pass any law that would compel or forbid any person in this Nation or any other nation to accept or reject any article of faith, so long as they did not deprive their fellow Americans or human beings of those same constitutional rights. However, in recognizing the influence of Christianity upon Western civilization, we are also commending the unshakable commitment of Christian principles, the very ones that compelled our Founding Fathers to resolutely declare that all men are created equal by God himself, and that because they are created equal, they are also created free, Madam Speaker, and that includes being free to embrace the religion of their own conviction.

Religious freedom is a central component of the Christian faith this resolution references. Indeed, the message of the one born on Christmas Day was from a savior who came to offer every member of the human family ultimate and eternal freedom, even at the cost of his own life.

Madam Speaker, as we enjoy our religious freedom in this season of peace, may we not forget that at this very moment American men and women in uniform are fighting a battle across the world so that all Americans might continue to freely exercise their faith, and that that right might ultimately some day be extended to all of mankind. President

Roosevelt probably said it best, Madam Speaker. He said in his Christmas Eve Nation message to the Nation, December 24, 1941, ``Our strongest weapon in this war is that conviction of the dignity and brotherhood of man, which Christmas Day signifies more than any other day or any other symbol. Against enemies who preach the principles of hate and practice them, we set our faith in human love and in God's care for us and all men everywhere."

So, Madam Speaker, with those feelings in mind and with love in my heart for people of every faith, let me here on this floor exercise my own religious freedom and wish you and everyone else under the sound of my voice a happy, holy, and merry Christmas.