

# Washington updat

April 6, 2018

Representative Chris Smith's office reports that a vote by the House of Representatives on H.R. 128 is scheduled for April 10. Smith's staff apologized for their inability to return all of the telephone calls and emails they have received about HR 128.

HR 128 will put the U.S. Congress on record as supporting basic human rights and democracy in Ethiopia, and pushing the U.S. government to take some meaningful action. Some people say that House Resolution 128 is meaningless. They are wrong, and the Ethiopian regime knows they are wrong: it is furiously lobbying Congress to kill it or water it down. Certainly HR 128 will not by itself sweep away oppression. It is, however, a meaningful step forward. The test should not be whether this bill solves all of Ethiopia's problems, but rather will it put some pressure on the Ethiopian regime.

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For example, the law has several provisions that are intended to prevent the misuse of humanitarian assistance. It states that the "Secretary of the Treasury shall instruct the United States executive director of each international financial institution to oppose financing for any activities that directly or indirectly involve forced evictions in Ethiopia."

These provisions reflect the hard work of Ethiopian-Americans who have contacted members of Congress to urge them to make U.S. foreign policy consistent with the American values, including democracy, freedom of expression, and basic human rights. Several members of Congress have taken special interest in Ethiopian human rights, including Rep. Christopher Smith (R-NJ), Rep. Mike Coffman (Colorado) Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-MD), Sen. Benjamin Cardin (D-MD).

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