

House resolution honors work of women religious in United States

WASHINGTON – A U.S. House resolution passed Sept. 22 “honors and commends Catholic sisters for their humble service and courageous sacrifice throughout the history” of the nation.

The resolution approved with a voice vote also specifically supports the goals of a traveling exhibit on women religious in the United States that is being sponsored by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious.

The resolution was introduced by Rep. Marcy Kaptur, D-Ohio, and co-sponsored by 67 members of both parties.

In speaking on the floor of the House in support of her resolution, Kaptur, a Catholic, cited the history of Catholic sisters in the country dating back to 1727, and their roles in nursing during the Civil War, in health care today, and in education and other types of ministries. She noted that since 1980 at least nine U.S. sisters have been killed for their work; they include three Ohio nuns murdered in El Salvador in 1980.

The resolution also cited the legacy of the nuns who were murdered “while working for social justice and human rights overseas.”

Rep. Mark Souder, R-Ind., a member of the United Brethren in Christ, also offered remarks for the Congressional Record about the influence of the sisters in his state, particularly St. Mother Theodore Guerin, who established a system of parish schools in Indiana.

The resolution said “the social, cultural and political contributions of Catholic sisters have played a vital role in shaping life in the United States” and that “such women have joined in unique forms of intentional communitarian life dedicated to prayer and service since the very beginnings of our nation’s history, fearlessly and often sacrificially committing their personal lives to teaching, healing and social action.”

In addition, the resolution noted that about one in six hospital patients in the United States is treated in a Catholic facility and that Catholic sisters “have been among the first to stand with the underprivileged, to work and educate among the poor and underserved, and to facilitate leadership through opportunity and example.”

They also “continue to provide shelter, food and basic human needs to the economically or socially disadvantaged and advocate relentlessly for the fair and equal treatment of all persons,” it said.

It also noted that Catholic sisters “work for the eradication of poverty and racism and for the promotion of nonviolence, equality and democracy in principle and in action.”

“The humanitarian work of Catholic sisters with communities in crisis ... throughout the world positions them as activists and diplomats of peace and justice for some of the most at-risk populations,” the resolution said.

The traveling exhibit “Women & Spirit: Catholic Sisters in America” opened in the Women’s Museum of Dallas Sept. 25, after a three-month showing at the Cincinnati Museum Center. The exhibit will move on to the Smithsonian’s S. Dillon Ripley Center in Washington in January, the Ellis Island Immigration Museum in New York next September and the Mississippi River Museum in Dubuque, Iowa, in early 2011.