

October 25, 2007: USCIRF Mourns Passing of Executive Director Joseph Crapa

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WASHINGTON-Joseph R. Crapa, the Executive Director of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, died Thursday after a struggle with cancer. Mr. Crapa, 63, had led the Commission since 2002.

"Joe had sharp political instincts but a soft personal touch," said Michael Cromartie, current Chair of the Commission. "He had an unwavering, principled commitment to advancing the work of this bipartisan Commission in protecting religious freedom worldwide. Everyone who knew and worked with Joe found him to be a remarkably committed public servant."

"We have lost a uniquely talented leader, trusted counselor and beloved friend to each of the Commissioners," said Commission Vice Chair Preeta D. Bansal, who served as Commission Chair in 2004-2005. "I respected tremendously his commitment to the substance of our work and his appreciation for the critical issues at the juncture of religion and foreign policy at this unique period in our history. His sharp political and human instincts and his deep love for humanity were crucial to our work in this sensitive arena. We loved him and will miss him dearly."

"It was an honor to serve on the Search Committee that recommended Joe Crapa to be the Executive Director of the Commission," said Vice Chair Richard D. Land. "As a Republican appointee, I was most happy to enthusiastically endorse and commend this faithful Democrat who loved America and loved the freedom for which it stands. He was a tireless proponent of religious freedom around the world and was instrumental in making the Commission an extremely effective voice for religious freedom. It was an honor and a privilege to have known him and served with him. All of us who knew him will miss him."

"Joe Crapa took a newly established Commission, at a crucial time in U.S. history, and, during his tenure, turned it into a respected voice on post-9/11 foreign policy and a source of new research and insights into the influence of religious freedom and related human rights on world affairs," said Felice D. Gaer, Chair of the Commission in 2002-2003, when Mr. Crapa joined USCIRF, and in 2006-2007.

"Joe's great love of people and respect for religion transcended all differences. With ebullience and panache, he effectively directed the Commission through a transformative period when the salience of the universal and inalienable right of religious freedom has been demonstrated daily by world events," said Nina Shea, who has served as a Commissioner since USCIRF's founding in 1999. "He will always be an inspiration for me and those who had the privilege of working with him."

Prior to coming to the Commission, Mr. Crapa served as Chief of Staff to Senator Charles E. Schumer (D-NY). Mr. Crapa spent the four prior years as Assistant Administrator at the U.S. Agency for International Development. He also served as Assistant Secretary at the Department of Agriculture and Associate Administrator at the Environmental Protection Agency, where his portfolio included Congressional Relations and Public Affairs.

For 10 years, Mr. Crapa served as Chief of Staff to Rep. David Obey (D-WI), currently the Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, and also as counsel to the House Appropriations Committee. He was an Adjunct Professor of Government at Georgetown University (1990-1995) and was a Stennis Fellow of Congress (1995-1997). He also was a Lecturer for the Washington Campus, a consortium of universities where he lectured on Congress and the policy process.

A native of Brooklyn, New York, Mr. Crapa graduated from Cathedral College Preparatory Seminary. He received a B.A. from St. John's University, an M.A. from Duke University, and a Ph.D. at the University of Arizona, where he was a National Defense Teaching Fellow.

The Commission extends its most sincere condolences to Mr. Crapa's wife Barbara, son Judd, daughter-in-law Gretchen, grandsons Sebastian and Baird, and his extended family. Michael Cromartie, Chair • Preeta D. Bansal, Vice Chair • Richard D. Land, Vice Chair • Don Argue • Imam Talal Y. Eid • Felice D. Gaer • Leonard A. Leo • Elizabeth H. Prodromou • Nina Shea • Ambassador John V. Hanford III, Ex-Officio