

2014 Report of the Cyprus & Hellenic Affairs Committee

To the Delegates/Alternates of the 92nd Supreme Convention:

The AHEPA Cyprus & Hellenic Affairs Committee wishes to first thank Supreme President Anthony Kouzounis for his leadership, confidence and support this past year. I also want to especially thank the members of the committee for all of their contributions this year. We could not have had a successful year without their hard work, support, and active participation—especially with our Capitol Hill Day. Last but not least, our gratitude and sincere thanks goes out to Andrew Kaffes, without his efforts, guidance, advice and direction we would not be positioned as well as we are for the future.

The Committee had three conference calls during the year. They were held: November 4, February 3, and June 16. Our calls served to plan our year, promote our goals, and assign our tasks. Our two main goals have remained a constant over the years: 1) to grow our grassroots presence and 2) to grow the Congress Caucus on Hellenic Issues. The Committee is also dedicated to raising awareness to their grassroots contacts as well as their surrounding community about what is happening on Capitol Hill as legislation advances or issues are presented that require attention. In between conference calls, the Committee is provided updates from Andrew as warranted. Andrew also provides the necessary materials and resources needed to Committee members to reach their goals—sample e-mail/letter content, Caucus listing, Foreign Affairs Committee rosters, and our grassroots contact form.

With respect to the second goal, the Caucus will face certain attrition due to mid-term election defeat and retirements. In fact, we've already seen some resignations. This is why this fall is important that our grassroots becomes familiar with all candidates running for Congress so that we can hit the ground running come the new 114th Congress in January 2015. This is where the hard work of the committee comes into play as each election cycle forces some members of the Hellenic Caucus out and newly-elected members become our targets for recruitment for Caucus membership.

Capitol Hill Day

Capitol Hill Day continues to be a successful exercise in civic responsibility and grassroots activism. This year it was held on March 25 in commemoration of Greek Independence. Here, again, Committee members were instrumental in their participation, or if they could not attend, instrumental in ensuring there was representation from their region. AHEPA family members representing 17 states registered for the event. More than 60 meetings were scheduled with members of Congress or their staffs.

The AHEPA Cyprus/Hellenic Affairs Committee sponsored the morning “Kick-off” reception at which U.S. Reps. Gus Bilirakis, Carolyn Maloney, Niki Tsongas, Gene Green, and Dina Titus all addressed the audience. Constant contact with key leaders in the Hellenic Caucus, Caucus Co-chairs Reps. Carolyn Maloney and Gus Bilirakis, has enabled us to grow the caucus and have our issues brought to the forefront of Congress.

- **The Hellenic Caucus has grown to 136 members, six of which came in the months following our Capitol Hill Day.**

A special thank you for this recent increase in membership goes to our Indiana grassroots team as well as our grassroots efforts in New England and the mid-Atlantic regions.

The Capitol Hill Day also affords AHEPA family members the opportunity to discuss domestic issues that resonate with AHEPA programs, such as affordable senior housing, domestic violence, and investment in medical research at NIH to find cures for Thalassemia or cancer.

Legislation of Interest

During the past AHEPA administrative year (August 2013 to July 2014), the following legislation continues to be worked on or has advanced, and the Committee actively educated or raised awareness about them to members of Congress and the grassroots:

H.Res.136—Urges Turkey to respect the rights and religious freedoms of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Resolution sits with House Foreign Affairs Committee.

H.Res.187 – Expressing the United States' commitment to the reunification of the Republic of Cyprus and the establishment of a unified government on Cyprus that guarantees the human rights of all Cypriots and condemns any attempt to use the current economic crisis as a means of imposing a settlement on the people of Cyprus, and for other purposes.

H.Res.188—Calling on Turkey to reopen Halki Theological School without further delay or conditions. (See **H.R.4347**).

H.Res.477—Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia should work within the framework of the United Nations process and in good faith with Greece to achieve longstanding United States and United Nations policy goals by finding a mutually acceptable name that must apply for all internal and international uses (*erga omnes*), for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

H.R. 2083/S.933—To authorize and request the President to award the Medal of Honor to James Megellas, formerly of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, and currently of Colleyville, Texas, for acts of valor on January 28, 1945, during the Battle of the Bulge in World War II.

- We continue to work in an attempt to award the Medal of Honor to Brother James Megellas.
- Most recently, we've worked with the Office of Rep. Niki Tsongas because of her work on the Armed Services Committee. We continue to explore other avenues to break through the Department of Defense's bureaucracy.

H.R.4347—The Turkey Christian Churches Accountability Act. The bill requires an annual report from the State Department on the status of stolen, confiscated or unreturned Christian properties in territories controlled by Turkey.

- The bill passed the House Committee on Foreign Affairs by voice vote on June 26, 2014.
- The bill included language from Rep. Bilirakis' H.Res.188 that calls on Turkey to reopen Halki Theological School without further delay or conditions.

On Cyprus

In November, Supreme President Anthony Kouzounis sent a letter to Secretary of State John Kerry, expressing concern with statements made by Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan on Cyprus. The prime minister said “There is no country named Cyprus.”

In February, a Joint Declaration was agreed to by the Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish Cypriots that provides the foundation for the resumption of settlement talks. The Committee members, especially our Cypriot American brethren, including Special Advisor on Cyprus Philip Christopher; were helpful in providing us with their opinions and perspective on the Declaration and the settlement process going forward.

As many are aware, Vice President Joe Biden made a historic visit to Cyprus in May. Executive Director Basil Mossaidis attended pre- and post-trip briefings held by the vice president and his national security staff. AHEPA issued a statement in praise of the visit, which was conveyed during the post-trip debriefing.

The week prior to Vice President Biden’s trip, a delegation of congressional staff visited Cyprus. We have been in communication with the main participants on the trip to explore ideas for follow-up and “next steps” on Capitol Hill. A briefing or congressional letter are possible ideas.

Separately, AHEPA did assist with a congressional letter that supported appropriations for funding programs for Cyprus.

Additional Issues

Voice of America Greek Service. AHEPA worked with the Hellenic Caucus to advocate for the restoration of FY2015 funding for the Voice of America Greek Service. In this effort, AHEPA helped to secure signatories to a congressional letter that supported the restoration of \$400,000 for the VOA Greek Service. All told, 20 U.S. representatives signed the letter, which was the most for this particular effort. In addition, AHEPA submitted written testimony to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Affairs, and Related Agencies on the topic that was entered into the public record.

Hagia Sophia. AHEPA has been in email communication since December 2013 with UNESCO regarding the threat from Turkish authorities to convert Hagia Sophia into a mosque. The supreme president sent a letter back in December which has opened a line of communication with UNESCO. We are attempting to secure a definitive position from UNESCO’s World Heritage Centre.

Ecumenical Patriarchate Letter. The staff of Senator Chris Murphy, who chairs the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Europe and Eurasia, outreached to AHEPA requesting assistance with outreach to Senator John McCain regarding a letter the Foreign Relations Committee circulated among itself on the topic of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Senator McCain was the last member of the Committee who had yet to sign the letter. I’m pleased AHEPA was able to generate some grassroots activity and emails were sent to Senator McCain’s office. As a result, he signed the letter eventually.

Korean War Memorial. AHEPA has been approached by the Korean War Veterans Memorial Foundation to assist with its efforts to raise awareness of **H.R.318**. The bill would authorize a Wall of Remembrance

as part of the Korean War Veterans Memorial and to allow certain private contributions to fund that Wall of Remembrance.

Advancing Relations with the American Jewish Community

I am pleased that my counterpart on the Committee from Canada, Brother Nick Aroutzidis, and Andrew Kaffes participated on the historic Joint Leadership Mission with leading American Jewish organizations that went to Israel, Cyprus, and Greece in January. Brothers Nick and Andrew shared their invaluable experiences with the Committee, which has been helpful to our working toward strengthening this relationship as the trilateral relationship between the countries becomes increasingly important to U.S. interests in the eastern Mediterranean.

One step that has been taken since the Mission is the effort to secure a direct airline route from Washington DC to Athens that carries on to Tel Aviv which would boost tourism to Greece and Israel. AHEPA has joined with AHI, B'nai B'rith International, and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations to make this request of United Airlines.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to serve the Order of AHEPA. This has been a great honor to work with, and for, this committee.

Respectfully Submitted,

Carl R. Hollister
Chairman

AHEPA Cyprus & Hellenic Affairs Committee Roster

2013 - 2014 Administrative Year

Committee Chairman

Carl Hollister

Canadian Chairman

Nick Aroutzidis

Region 1 (AHEPA Districts 1 & 2)

Sandy Papadopoulos

William Caras

Region 2 (AHEPA Districts 3 & 4)

Philip Yamalis

Col. Nick Vamvakias

Demetrios P. Govotsos

Region 3 (AHEPA Districts 5 & 6)

Savas Tsivikos

Vassos R. Chrysanthou

Region 4 (AHEPA Districts 7, 8 & 9)

Nick Kallan

Region 5 (AHEPA Districts 10 & 11)

Carl Hollister

Region 6 (AHEPA Districts 12, 13, 14)

Upper Midwest

Tom Gober

Midwest Plains States

Paul Bitsos

Region 7 (AHEPA Districts 16, 17)

Agapios Agapiou

Region 8 (AHEPA Districts 18, 19, 20, 21, 22)

Northern Region Chairman

E. John Rumpakis

Northern Region Vice Chairman

Alex Christy

Region 8 (AHEPA Districts 18, 19, 20, 21, 22)

Vacant

Canada (AHEPA Districts 23, 24, & 26)

Paul Michael

Special Advisor on Cyprus

Philip Christopher