



Setting Brushfires of Freedom In the Minds of Men

By Kerry Hooks-French

WA state CSG Student,

“It does not take a majority to prevail; but rather an irate, tireless minority, keen on setting brushfires of freedom in the minds of men.” – Samuel Adams

With everything going on in the world, from ISIS, to the disastrous Iran deal, to Shari’ah law’s encroachment on the constitution, to terror attacks right here in the United States, Islam has been in the headlines more than ever before. I spent 20 years in the United States Navy as a Religious Program Specialist supporting the religious rights of service members and their families of the Navy and Marine Corps - on board ships, overseas, and at shore commands. Part of my job was to understand the major world religions and provide administrative, logistical and protective support for chaplains.

After I retired from the Navy, I happened upon a presentation featuring Brigitte Gabriel, founder of [ACT for America](#), formerly from war-torn Lebanon and now a U.S. citizen. She spoke first hand about Islam, Shari’ah law and the terrorism that destroyed her home, her community and her childhood. She connected the dots with what I already knew about Islam and what I had seen with my own eyes when I was stationed in the Middle East. I followed up with extensive research, which confirmed what I had learned. Suddenly, it all made sense. That’s when I knew that I had to become involved.

I began a [local chapter of ACT for America](#), and set some very high goals of getting legislation passed, such as the American Laws for American Courts bill (ALAC). In my journey I was invited to join one of the first [Center for Self Governance \(CSG\)](#) trainings in Washington State. By that time I had already given up trying to get the ALAC bill passed. Although I had succeeded in getting several related bills introduced, they never got past the hearing stage. So instead, I focused on a different issue: [Female Genital](#)

[Mutilation](#) (FGM). Who could be against protecting [more than a half million women and girls](#) from this barbaric custom brought to America from Islamic countries?

My class assignment papers focused on the problem of [FGM in America](#). I was shocked to learn my state of Washington was in the top 10 for at-risk girls despite the fact that in 1995 a federal law was passed outlawing the practice. In WA there is no requirement to report FGM, no resources for educating the at-risk communities, and no statistics documented to serve as a basis for action.

Through my training, I learned to work with legislators and how to become more effective. I approached a representative outside my district because I felt she would be a great person to introduce the bill. Little did I know that Representative Elizabeth Scott had been an English teacher in the United Arab Emirates and had personal experience with the women who had experienced the barbaric custom of FGM. She was well aware of the practice and was very receptive to the idea of sponsoring a bill.

Our first year, she introduced the bill and got exactly zero co-sponsors. Not to be defeated, when she introduced it the next session, I personally went to Olympia WA to help her secure the needed co-sponsors. My first assignment in training was to develop relationships with the legislators. I did, and knew many of them on sight. On the opening day of session I pursued the legislators I could find, asking them to co-sponsor the bill. By the end of the day I had 16 co-sponsors. Rep. Scott secured the last bipartisan co-sponsor for a total of 17 co-sponsors. But a temporary victory was soon dampened when our bill, with bipartisan support, could not get a hearing and died in committee despite the hundreds of calls and emails sent to the committee chairman from citizens. We found out that the [Council on American Islamic Relations \(CAIR\)](#) lobbyists had put political pressure on the chairman to kill any bill that we brought to the legislature with ACT for America involvement. By statute, the bill must be re-introduced with the same co-sponsors in January. We have also learned Rep. Scott will get a hearing on the bill in January. It will then receive the support and involvement of activists who have since been rallied around the state. The skills I learned in applied civics training made all the difference in my success with the FGM bill.

Working with everyone on this bill has been trying, but exciting, and rewarding. I have learned to expect I will work in cooperation with a very diverse group of fellow citizens on various issues. I secured the testimony of a transgender doctor who does reconstructive surgery on these suffering girls for free.

Because of my success in working in the legislative process, I have been privileged to speak to local groups on the importance of citizen training. In addition, Rep. Scott, who decided to run for Congress in the 1st Congressional District, leads her opponent by 7 points - all due to her work on the FGM bill. [Applied civics training](#) has literally “set brushfires of freedom in the minds of men”!

As an added bonus, the relationships I have made with various legislators has resulted in more bills being introduced including a Refugee Resettlement bill, a food labeling bill for religiously slaughtered meat, a human decapitation enhancement bill (adding more time to a 1st degree murder conviction), and a bill requiring schools to make textbooks accessible upon request.

Through amendments to other bills, we finally succeeded in passing the ALAC bill after all. These statutes prohibit the establishment of Shari’ah courts in WA and the use of foreign law in Washington State courts, which would have deprived WA citizens of their constitutionally protected rights.

And I’m just getting started.

The Language of Liberty series is a collaborative effort of the Center for Self Governance (CSG) Administrative Team. The authors include administrative staff, selected students, and guest columnists. They may be contacted at info@tncsg.org To learn more, go to CenterForSelfGovernance.com.

Word Count: 1007