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Committee on Government Reform  
2157 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

**VIA FACSIMILE: 202-225-3974**

Dear Chairman Dan Burton:

I am writing concerning Pat Roush's efforts to regain custody of her two children from her ex-husband in Saudi Arabia. I was the United States Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from 1994 to 1996.

As I understand the facts in this case, Pat Roush met her husband Khalid al-Gheshayan while he was in the United States studying. They were married in the United States, had two daughters in the United States and were divorced in the United States. As part of the divorce decree Pat was given custody and her ex-husband was given visitation rights. In 1986, when the girls were seven and three, Mr. Gheshayan, in violation of the United States court order, during one of his visitations, kidnapped the girls and took them to Saudi Arabia.

Since then, Pat Roush has seen her daughters only once and that was for only one hour during a visit she made while I was Ambassador which I and the Embassy helped arrange. The girls are now twenty-three and nineteen. The older daughter has been married to someone by her father.

This case has always seemed to me to be about American laws and not Saudi laws or customs. Mr. Gheshayan voluntarily put himself under American jurisdiction when he came here to study. He was married under American law; he was divorced under American law. The two girls are American citizens. He violated an American court order when he took them to Saudi Arabia. This is about protecting American citizens and the orders of an American court.

When Ms. Roush asked me for help, I did all that I could to secure her daughters' return to her since I believed that this is an important part of what an Ambassador should do. I raised this case at every level of the Saudi government including the Foreign Minister. At no time did I feel or was told that raising this issue in any way harmed or interfered with the United States-Saudi Arabia bilateral relationship. On the contrary, the Saudi officials with

whom I raised this issue were interested and helpful and tried to find a solution. In fact, due to my raising this issue, the Foreign Ministry sent a Diplomatic Note which said that they endorsed a compromise by which the girls would return to the United States in the summer and live in Saudi Arabia during the school year with the United States court order being adjusted accordingly.

Nothing that our embassy or the Saudi government did, however, moved Mr. Gheshayan one bit. The one time I met with him in the office of a ranking Saudi official, Mr. Gheshayan was incredibly rude to both the Saudi official and to me.

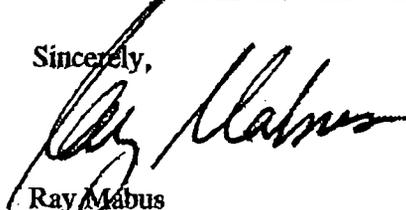
One tactic did get Mr. Gheshayan's attention. Since Saudi's usually have close ties to their extended families, I simply said that any Saudi with the same last name would not be issued a visa to visit the United States until Mr. Gheshayan returned the two girls. Visas are a privilege and not a right, and an exception to this was made in the case of health issues. Mr. Gheshayan called the Embassy several times saying that his family was putting pressure on him to return the children and that this was not fair. However, about two months after implementing this policy, I resigned as Ambassador and returned home as I had planned to do. I understand that the policy was not continued by the next Ambassador and Mr. Gheshayan has continued to refuse to return the girls or even allow Ms. Roush to visit.

While a case like this may not seem to be a big policy issue, it is everything to the people involved. I believe that one of the main jobs of the American government is to protect American citizens and to uphold American law. I have read that an unclassified cable sent from the State Department to our Embassy in Riyadh, presumably after my tenure, instructed our embassy to remain "impartial." How can our government remain impartial when two American citizens were taken and are being held in violation of our laws? Is this not exactly the type of situation where our government should be active and involved in trying to get them returned to their legal custodian, their mother?

I believe that this case and others like it should be raised by the very highest levels of our government to the very highest levels of the Saudi government. I have read that President Bush has raised the case of the American young woman in jail in South America after her conviction for pro-terrorist activities with the President of the country where she is being held. Surely this case where American laws were broken and two American girls are being kept from their mother and their home deserves the same action.

I do not for one minute believe that this would in any way threaten or harm our relationship with Saudi Arabia. Allies can and do raise issues like this all the time. The American government should stand up for American citizens and American laws.

Sincerely,



Ray Mabus

rem/sf