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VISCLOSKY HONORS SAINT GEORGE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Mr. Speaker: It is with great honor and enthusiasm that I congratulate Saint George Serbian Orthodox Church as its congregation joins together in celebration of its 100th Anniversary. The congregation, along with Parish Priest, Reverend Aleksandar Savic, and Parish President, Mr. Svetko Balach, will be celebrating this momentous milestone with a celebratory reception on Sunday, October 2, 2011, at the Center for Visual and Performing Arts in Munster, Indiana.

Saint George Serbian Orthodox Church of East Chicago, Indiana was established on October 30, 1911, when a small group of immigrants from Serbia joined together with the goal of preserving Serbian culture and religious tradition. That same year, they obtained the services of a full time priest, elected their first executive board, and began construction of their church. The church dedication ceremony took place on Saint George's Day, May 6, 1912. Many of the Serbian families sacrificed and gave of their time to assist in building this tremendous place of worship. The church continued to grow and in the 1920s a small hall and the parish house were built on the church property. In 1949, construction began on a new banquet hall/social center which was completed a year later. Saint George Serbian Orthodox Church became the second Serbian church in Indiana following the church built in South Bend; and is the fourth oldest original Serbian Orthodox Church in the United States in which services continue to be held.

During its existence, Saint George Serbian Orthodox Church Parish experienced many changes as its membership grew. These changes were not only physical changes within the parish itself but also a religious schism within the Serbian Orthodox Church that affected its followers. In 1963, a decision from Belgrade regarding the church structure resulted in years of turmoil that divided Serbian Americans and the Serbian Orthodox Church into two groups. Some members of the church in East Chicago left and went on to build a new church in Northwest Indiana. In 1992, the church reunified and what remained from the division were many churches throughout the area spreading Serbian Orthodoxy. Today the Serbian Orthodox Church remains one of the greatest assets for East Chicago.

Saint George Serbian Orthodox Church continues to touch the lives of countless individuals through its compassionate service, especially to those in need. Over the years, the church has come to the aid of Serbian immigrants by providing food, shelter and assistance in finding employment. The church auxiliary group, Circle of Serbian Sisters, along with three other Serbian parishes in Northwest Indiana holds an annual fundraiser called Mothers Against Hunger. This event raises tens of thousands of dollars for Serbian orphans in the former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that you and my other distinguished colleagues join me in honoring and congratulating the Saint George Serbian Orthodox Church of East Chicago, Indiana on its 100th Anniversary. Throughout many hardships and trials, the members of Saint George have dedicated themselves to preserving Serbian heritage, tradition, and spiritual beliefs. For their commitment to serving so many in need, the church leaders and congregation are to be admired and are worthy of the highest praise.