Jonathan Stertzbach, an independent Baptist by training. Chaplain Stertzbach was called to perform a memorial service for a fallen soldier. In that division, he had to e-mail his prayer to the divisional chaplain. In the prayer, the divisional chaplain struck the words “Jesus Christ.” He sent back the prayer with the strike-through of “Jesus Christ” to Jonathan Stertzbach. Chaplain Stertzbach went to the company commander, and asked permission not to pray.

The company commander says, Why not? He says, Because I’ve been ordered not to close my prayer as I see fit, based on my conscience, and knowing that the deceased soldier had attended his chapel, a Christian chapel.

So the company commander said to Chaplain Stertzbach, You will pray, and you will pray as you see fit.

He did, and he closed his prayer in the name of his Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. From that, the divisional chaplain removed Chaplain Stertzbach from his chapel.

In 2005, when I heard this story, I wrote a letter to Lieutenant General Stanley Green, the inspector general of the United States Army, and I asked for an investigation into this case involving Chaplain Stertzbach. I am pleased to say, Madam Speaker, that Chaplain Stertzbach was returned to his chapel. The inspector general found that he should never have been removed.

Madam Speaker, very briefly, I just want to read the bill, which is so simple. This is what it says: to ensure that every military chaplain has the prerogative to close a prayer outside of a religious service according to the dictates of the chaplain’s own conscience.

Madam Speaker, this is a sad day in America. I would be on this floor for a Jewish rabbi. I would be on this floor for a soldier who happened to be a chaplain in the military. I hope that my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will look at this bill, because all it says is that you can close your prayer based on your heart, based on the dictates of your faith outside the church on base, even over the body of a dead soldier.

FEBRUARY 6, 2005.

Department of the Army,
The Inspector General,
1700 Army Pentagon,
Washington, DC.

DEAR LTG STANLEY GREEN: It has come to my attention that in all branches of the military it is unlawful for chaplains to pray in adherence to their faith. I have read reports, received letters, and seen documentation which verifies that suppression of religious beliefs throughout the United States Armed Forces is a pervasive problem, affecting military chaplains from all denominations and religions. Of particular concern is an incident involving Army Chaplain Chaplain Jonathon Stertzbach of the 3-6 FA HHH in Iraq. I am writing to request that the Army Inspector General investigate whether Chaplain Stertzbach was illegally removed from his chapel.

This chaplain who is serving our troops in harm’s way in Iraq was asked by another unit, whose chaplain had to return home to start chemotherapy after cancer was discovered, to serve the spiritual needs of the unit’s soldiers in weekly movement to an undisclosed FOB (Forward Operating Base) as well as his own battalion. During one of the missions, tragically, one of the soldiers was killed in action. The unit’s Commanding Officer asked the chaplain to perform the memorial ceremony because he had bravely served the soldiers, and gone to the risk of convoysing to the FOB (Forward Operating Base) weekly.

Before the memorial ceremony, the chaplain submitted two prayers and a meditation for the Division Chaplain and his direct superior chaplains to review and was approved. The Brigade Chaplain, having just arrived from Fort Drum, attempted to remove the chaplain from administering the prayers of the memorial ceremony because he concluded his prayer in the name of Jesus Christ in a public forum. The chaplain, adhering to his conscience and faith tradition, said he would not strike the words Jesus Christ.

The unit’s Commanding Officer intervened, explaining that Chaplain Stertzbach volunteered to serve a different unit outside of his assigned unit and placed his life in harm’s way to provide for the needs of the unit’s soldiers. He then proceeded to instructed that Chaplain Stertzbach would pray according to his faith tradition and the prayers that he had already submitted. The Brigade Chaplain told him to qualify his prayer at the beginning with “Please pray according to your faith tradition, as I pray according to mine” and then close the prayer with “in the name we pray, and in Jesus’ name I pray.” Chaplain Stertzbach delivered the memorial prayer and prayers for the fallen hero, but still followed orders with the ‘qualifier’ remaining in place.

After the incident, Chaplain Stertzbach’s story reached the media. The Chaplain was directly contacted by the Washington Times and referenced in a Washington Times January story. Chaplain Stertzbach’s incident was not printed, but he was quoted as saying the following:

“You need to allow people to pray according to their faith group. Many faith groups do not pray in general and generic terms. . . . For Christian groups, the name of Jesus is from power comes. I believe Chaplain Stertzbach answered questions fairly, accurately, and within his legal rights. Consequently, his answers to the media surrounding the memorial ceremony resulted in Chaplain Stertzbach’s removal from his chapel.

I am concerned that Chaplain Stertzbach was removed without justification. Again, I am requesting that you investigate this incident and provide an explanation.

Sincerely,

WALTER B. JONES, Member of Congress.
HEALTH CARE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. MORAN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MORAN. Madam Speaker, I came to Congress with a purpose, a purpose of working to preserve the way of life that we live in Kansas. I never moved to Washington, D.C. because I love the sense of community and belonging that Kansas communities offer. Access to quality, affordable health care is one of those things that determine whether our community and I have a future. This is why the current health care reform debate is so important to me, and I am extremely concerned about the direction that we are going.

During his campaign, President Obama stressed transparency and accountability in the health care debate. He said, I'm going to have all the negotiations around a big table and that the negotiations will be televised on C-SPAN so that people could see who is making the arguments on behalf of their constituents and who is making the arguments on behalf of drug companies or insurance companies.

But now the transparency that the President promised us is nowhere to be found, as several Democrat senators and White House staff hole themselves away to draft the health care reform bill behind closed doors. I understand that Democrats' desire to put two Senate committee bills, but this process concerns me because in this closed office, the future of health care for Kansans is being decided.

Does this small group understand the problem that cutting Medicare reimbursement rates will pose for Kansas hospitals, doctors, nurses and other health care providers? Kansas hospitals operate on razor-thin margins because they are already dramatically underpaid by Medicare. If these rates are further reduced, as the current reform bills propose, Kansas hospitals may be forced to close and access to health care for Kansans will be reduced.

Is this small group considering common-sense ideas that have been proposed by Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle that would make quality coverage more affordable and more accessible for more Americans? Some of those ideas that we have talked about include placing as much control over peoples' health as possible in their hands by giving employers and insurers flexibility to reward individuals who improve their health and manage their disease; encouraging medical students to become primary care physicians and incentivizing insurance companies to offer patients in underserved communities; permitting the sale of insurance across State lines, establishing high risk pools and reinsurance pools to address preexisting conditions and providing incentives to low-income families to retain or purchase private health insurance that best meets their needs; reforming our medical liability system to reduce frivolous lawsuits that lead to inflated insurance premiums and the practice of defensive medicine; encouraging health care savings by offering individuals health savings accounts that enable families to take ownership of their health; and upgrading our outdated health records system through the use of new technology to streamline costs and reduce medical errors.

It is my hope that these issues are being addressed as the President and Democrat leaders craft the health care reform bill. I have heard from my State, and I have heard many Kansans who have worries. They are concerned about their health care and about the future of their State and country. Kansans and all Americans deserve to know what their Representatives are proposing, and they deserve to know the assurance their business will be conducted in a deliberate and open way.

The President has expressed a desire to explore a wide range of options for health care reform. Kansans want comprehensive reforms that enhance our current system and reduce health care costs. What we do not want is the trillionocation in new deficit spending, reduced