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 Roman Catholic priest and 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.

Mr. Speaker, as I close, I want to make it clear, because I see my friend on the floor who is of the Muslim faith, that I would be on this floor tonight for a Muslim chaplain who was told that he, an imam, could not close a prayer based on their faith.

Madam Speaker, I close by asking God to please bless our men and women in uniform. I ask God to please bless the families of our men and women in uniform. I ask God in His loving arms to hold the families who have given a child dying for freedom in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Madam Speaker, I ask God to give wisdom, strength and courage to the President of the United States. And I ask three times, God, please, God, please, God, please, God, please, God, please to close America.

February 6, 2005.

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

Dear LTG STANLEY GREEVES: It has come to my attention that in all branches of the military it is compulsory for chaplains to pray in adherence to their faith. I have read reports, letters, and seen documentation which verifies that suppression of religious views is being practiced in the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps. This is a serious violation of the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States.

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.
IRAN SANCTIONS ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida (Ms. Ros-Lehtinen) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Madam Speaker, I urge the majority to bring the Iran Sanctions Act to the House floor next week for a vote, followed by a quick Senate action so that it gets to the President's desk before the end of the year. We must do this now.

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 was born and raised 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 communities will 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 whether they believe 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 hide themselves away to draft the health care reform bill behind closed doors. I understand that the Democrats' desire to hold 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 problems that cutting Medicare reimbursements 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 complacency ideas that were 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 emphasis on wellness as on ill- ness 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 to invest in innovative care for patients in underserved communities; permitting the sale of insurance across State lines, establishing high risk pools and reinsurance pools to address pre-existing 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. As the proposal moves to the Senate, 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 that the insurance 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 common-sense reforms that enhance our current system and reduce health care costs. What do we not want is the trillion in new deficit spending, reduced...