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Of particular concern is an incident involving Army Captain Chaplain Jonathan Stertzbach. 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). During a mission, tragically, one of the soldiers was killed in action. The unit's Commanding Officer asked this chaplain to perform the memorial ceremony because he had bravely served the soldiers and risked his own life.

Before the memorial ceremony, the chaplain submitted two prayers for review. The Brigade Chaplain attempted to remove the chaplain from praying at the memorial ceremony because he concluded his prayer in the name of Jesus Christ. 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. The Commanding Officer instructed that Chaplain Stertzbach would pray according to his faith tradition.

After the incident, Chaplain Stertzbach's story reached the media. Consequently, his answers to the media and the incident surrounding the memorial ceremony resulted in Chaplain Stertzbach's removal from his chapel. This is unacceptable!

Since the beginning of our nation's military, chaplains have played an integral role, fulfilling the spiritual and emotional needs of the brave men and women who serve—and they have always prayed according to their faith tradition. It is in the best interest of our Armed Services and this nation to guarantee the constitutional right of military chaplains to pray according to their faith.

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, DC, February 6, 2006.

LTC STANLEY E. GREEN,
Department of the Army, The Inspector General,
Army Pentagon, Washington, DC.

DEAR LTC STANLEY GREEN: It has come to my attention that in all branches of the military it is increasingly difficult for chaplains to pray in adherence to their faith. I have read reports, received letters, and seen documentation which verifies that suppression of religious freedom throughout our Armed Forces is a pervasive problem, affecting military chaplains from all denominations and religions. Of particular concern is an incident involving Army Captain Chaplain Jonathan Stertzbach of the 3-6 FA HHB 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 this chaplain to perform the Memorial Ceremony because he had bravely served the soldiers, and gone to the risk of conveying 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 supervising chaplain 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. The Commanding Officer 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 thy name we pray, and in Jesus' name I pray." Chaplain Stertzbach delivered the Memorial Meditation 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 where all the power comes."

I believe Chaplain Stertzbach answered questions fairly, accurately, and within his legal rights. Consequently, his answers to the media and the incident 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.

REMEMBERING STAFF SERGEANT MICHAEL DURBIN

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

Mr. POE. Mr. Speaker, he was buried yesterday in the National Cemetery in Houston, Texas. Monday I met with his parents, Jerry and Teresa, in their home in Humble, Texas, and I am talking about Army Staff Sergeant Michael Durbin. He was born on July 6, 1979, in Houston, Texas. He grew up in Spring, Texas, and attended Nimitz High School where he earned the nickname "Iceman." He excelled in sports and was the quarterback on the football team. He also ran track and played on the baseball team. He was the oldest of five kids, and his father said, "When he

entered a room, he drew everyone's attention."

He attended Kingwood College before deciding to enlist in the Army in 2001 at the age of 21. His goal in life was to someday work for the CIA, and he enlisted in the hopes that the military would be a quick route toward that goal.

He met his wife Janelle while working together at a Houston computer store. They were married in 2001 and had a son Austin and a daughter Alyssa together. By the age of 26, Michael had already become staff sergeant in an air assault unit, and had bold aspirations of becoming a member of the elite and daring Delta Force.

Staff Sergeant Durbin had already served two tours of duty in the Middle East and was deployed for his third tour of duty in September 2005. Family members said he lived to serve his country, and 2 weeks ago during combat operations in Baghdad, Michael became the 194th Texan killed since the start of the war. He was killed when a homemade bomb exploded while he was on patrol. Michael was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team of the 101st Airborne Division, Fort Campbell, Kentucky. By the way, Mr. Speaker, 1 out of every 10 Americans wearing the uniform tonight is from the State of Texas.

I have a photograph of Staff Sergeant Michael Durbin taken shortly before he received another stripe on his left sleeve. Several days before he was killed in Iraq, he sent his wife Janelle a bouquet of flowers, and she talked with him the morning he died. He called her to tell her that he was leaving for a mission, and he loved her and would be back in a few days. He loved playing with his kids and being in love with his wife. They would have celebrated their fifth wedding anniversary next month.

Michael will be remembered by his family and friends for his passion for computers. He was a gifted artist with a special talent for original cartoon characters and superheroes. He actually designed his platoon's boot camp T-shirt when he entered the Army.

With his entire life before him, and his aspirations to serve Americans, Michael risked everything to fight for the values and freedoms we as Americans enjoy this day and every day. He was fighting so the Iraqis can enjoy these freedoms as well.

With the death of Michael Durbin, this Nation lost a freedom fighter, a loving father, and, as his dad said, a perfect son.

I would like to extend my prayers and condolences to his parents, Jerry and Teresa; to his family, relatives and friends in Spring, Texas, and Fort Campbell, Kentucky; his wife Janelle; and his children Alyssa, Austin and Hayley. Michael touched the lives of many people in his 26 years, and our hearts are filled with gratitude for brave soldiers like Staff Sergeant Michael Durbin.

In the words of country singer Randy Travis in his song "America Will Always Stand," he sings the following lyrics about the American soldier: "Walking through the fires of danger, there are those who gave their lives. They're the world's greatest heroes, and we won't forget their sacrifice. So raise the banner called Old Glory. Let us join our fellow man. History will tell this story, America will always stand."

Mr. Speaker, history will tell the story of all the brave soldiers like Staff Sergeant Michael Durbin who walked through the fires of danger for freedom for Americans.

That's just the way it is.

SRI LANKA PEACE PROCESS RESOLUTION

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

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening to ask that my colleagues join me in supporting a resolution I introduced today that urges the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam to engage positively in peace talks. I am deeply concerned about the ongoing violence caused by terrorism in Sri Lanka. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil, also known as the Tamil Tigers, is a group designated by the United States State Department as a terrorist organization. I hope this body can express its disapproval of the violence and instead voice full support for the resumption of constructive peace talks between both sides.

For over two decades, there has been armed strife between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Tamil Tigers, costing an estimated 65,000 lives. In a breakthrough agreement brokered by Norway back in 2002, the Government of Sri Lanka and the Tamil Tigers signed a cease-fire. Unfortunately, the Tamil Tigers have committed a number of violations, and the peace process has broken down.

On August 12, 2005, Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister was brutally assassinated by a sniper, and it has been widely acknowledged that the LTTE members had targeted him for some time. Though LTTE has denied any involvement, past history demonstrates that the group never claims responsibility for their crimes. There is now clear evidence, for example, that the Tamil Tigers ordered assassinations of India's Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, President R. Premadasa, and others. These patterns indicate that the Tamil Tigers were likely involved in Mr. Kadirgamar's assassination.

In addition to the death of Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister, the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission has recorded over 3,000 violations of the cease-fire agreement by the Tamil Tigers. These violations include assassinations and abductions, particularly

the forcible abduction of children for armed combat and kidnapping individuals for ransom.

This past December marked the bloodiest month since the cease-fire agreement came into effect in 2002. Nearly 70 people, about 40 of them from the Sri Lanka Army and Navy, have been killed as a result of the Tamil Tigers' guerilla actions. The Tamil Tigers continue to follow their past policy of denying any responsibility for these actions.

Mr. Speaker, it is important that the U.S. continue to reject the actions and violent tactics of the Tamil Tigers and apply international pressure to request that they begin conducting themselves in a responsible and credible manner. We must insist that the Tamil Tigers demonstrate a willingness to change, abstain from violence, and establish their commitment to the peace process.

The recent pledge to continue peace talks in February in Geneva, Switzerland, is encouraging, but it must include positive engagement by both parties. It is necessary that the Government of Sri Lanka and the Tamil Tigers renegotiate a cease-fire agreement and implement the agreement in a productive and successful manner so the hostilities do not resume. Without progress at the negotiating table, there is a real threat of another armed conflict.

Mr. Speaker, Sri Lanka is Asia's oldest democracy and remains a close friend of the United States. As the founder and current cochair of the Congressional Caucus on Sri Lanka, I encourage the Bush administration to take the steps necessary to support Sri Lanka during these trying times and continue to strengthen ties between the United States and Sri Lanka.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that my colleagues join me in cosponsoring this resolution. Congress must convey the importance of a constructive peace process and urge both parties to cooperate in good faith in order to find a fair and lasting resolution to Sri Lanka's armed conflict. It is time we ensure peace in Sri Lanka as well as greater stability throughout the South Asia region.

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

(Mr. OSBORNE addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

URGING RELEASE OF DR. GONZALEZ-MEJIAS AND DR. DARIAS-MESA

Mr. MACK. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to claim the time of the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. OSBORNE).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Florida?

There was no objection.

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

Mr. MACK. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to call attention to a great humanitarian injustice facing two Cuban refugee doctors and their families.

On April 10, 2002, Dr. David Gonzalez-Mejias and Dr. Marialis Darias-Mesa were notified by the U.S. Government that they had been awarded documents that would allow them to immigrate to America and begin a new life in freedom.

Unfortunately, the Cuban Government denied these doctors permission to leave Cuba with their spouses and children. They were told because they were doctors, they would have to remain in Cuba for another 3 years. However, their families were permitted to leave and now reside in Florida.

Three years later, in April 2005, the doctors again sought permission to leave Cuba. That permission was once again denied, and they were told they would have to remain in Cuba. Fearing the Castro regime would continue to block their exodus to freedom and reunification with their families, the doctors copied their original United States parole papers and made a desperate attempt to escape tyranny.

While on a boat fleeing Cuba, they were picked up by the United States Coast Guard and turned over to the Bahamian Government along with 17 other Cuban nationals at Cay Sal in the Bahamas. Unlike the other refugees, Dr. Gonzalez-Mejias and Dr. Darias-Mesa had been awarded an authorization for parole of an alien allowing them to enter the United States, and they should not have been turned over to the Bahamian Government. But they were, and since then they have been detained in the Bahamas in deplorable conditions.

Since June, the United States Government has actively sought the release of the doctors to U.S. custody and to prevent their repatriation to Cuba. However, despite numerous official requests for their release and meetings between our governments, including a meeting I had with the Bahamian Ambassador to the United States, the Bahamian Government continues to debate, deliberate and drag its feet about releasing these doctors to our custody.

Mr. Speaker, the time is past due for the Bahamian Government to release these doctors to the United States. Our two countries have always enjoyed strong relations, and we all want that friendship to continue without question or concern. But in this matter, the Bahamian Government is not acting as friends should. They are denying liberty to two refugees who were awarded freedom by the United States.

This past weekend I spent nearly 2 hours with the families of these doctors. I was moved by their incredible strength and faith that their family would one day be reunited. I was also