

TRIBUTE TO CHIEF PETTY
OFFICER FERNANDO JORGE, USCG

HON. JO BONNER

OF ALABAMA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 7, 2012

Mr. BONNER. Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to U.S. Coast Guard Chief Petty Officer Fernando Jorge, age 39, of Buena Park, California and to honor his service to our country.

CPO Jorge was one of four U.S. Coast Guard crewmen aboard a MH-65C Dolphin helicopter when it crashed into Mobile Bay on February 28, 2012, during an evening training mission. The accident claimed the lives of each of the crew.

CPO Jorge, a 20-year Coast Guard veteran and rescue swimmer, was stationed at the Aviation Training Center in Mobile, Alabama at the time of the accident.

A devoted professional who dedicated his life to saving others, CPO Jorge was accustomed to the challenges of the sea. According to the Mobile Press-Register, CPO Jorge was featured on the History Channel's "Extreme Search and Rescue" program in 2004.

CPO Jorge and his fellow crewmen of CG-6535 each shared a love of service and a dedication to saving lives. The Coast Guard is a vital protector for our Nation's coastal communities. We can never thank them enough for their commitment to our country.

Mobile is a Coast Guard city and we suffer the loss of CPO Jorge as one of our own. We grieve with his family and we stand with them and the entire United States Coast Guard family.

To quote the words of the Coast Guard hymn,

Eternal Father, Lord of hosts,
Watch o'er the men who guard our coasts.
Protect them from the raging seas
And give them light and life and peace.
Grant them from Thy great throne above
The shield and shelter of Thy love.

On behalf of the people of Alabama and a grateful Nation, I offer condolences to CPO Jorge's family and many friends. You are each in our thoughts and prayers.

TRIBUTE TO RANDY AND SHARI
PULMAN OF SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

HON. CHARLES A. GONZALEZ

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 7, 2012

Mr. GONZALEZ. Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing Randy and Shari Pulman of San Antonio on being honored at the 2012 Congregation Agudas Achim's Annual Gala and Honors Evening.

Over the years, they have been shining examples for our community and have left an indelible mark on the well-being and development of countless San Antonians. Shari and Randy have set a high standard of leadership through their dedication to Agudas Achim Congregation and the entire community of San Antonio.

Since 1995, Mr. Pulman has served on the Agudas Achim's Board of Trustees, most recently serving as Vice President-Finance Administration and as Treasurer of Agudas

Achim's Endowment Fund Board of Directors. Mr. Pulman's civic engagement is not limited to the Agudas Achim congregation, but includes various leadership roles at Camp Young Judea, the Golden Manor Foundation, and Israel Bonds. Mrs. Pulman's active leadership within the community is evident through her involvement as Vice President of Golden Manor Jewish Senior Services, President of the Campus Board of Directors of the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Campus of the San Antonio Jewish Community, and President of the Barshop JCC. Mrs. Pulman was also recognized with the Jewish Federation of San Antonio's Sylvia F. and Harry Sugarman Young Leadership Award in 1998 for her efforts on their Board of Directors. Additionally, Shari and Randy Pulman both hold leadership positions within the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).

During the course of just a few years, their tireless support of Israel and the work they have done for Congregation Agudas Achim have been an inspiration to all those around them and a model for generations to follow. I would again ask you to congratulate Shari and Randy Pulman on being honored at the 2012 Congregation Agudas Achim's Annual Gala and Honors evening.

HONORING THE PEOPLE OF INDI-
ANA IN THE AFTERMATH OF
DEADLY TORNADOES

HON. TODD C. YOUNG

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 7, 2012

Mr. YOUNG of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, I rise today because I've never been prouder to call southern Indiana home.

Late Friday afternoon in our part of America, a disaster brought neighbors together, turned strangers into friends, and reminded us all of what it means to be part of a community.

Over the course of several hours, fierce winds, softball-sized hail, and deadly tornadoes descended upon southern Indiana communities, leaving behind a 50-mile path of destruction from New Pekin to Chelsea and beyond.

Our people are still assessing the costs, but we know this much: at least 13 Hoosiers have died; scores have lost their homes and businesses; and citizens across the region have suffered untold damage to their personal and public property.

As hard as it is to imagine, the tragedy might have been worse were it not for the bravery, and resilience, of rank-and-file Hoosiers.

Our firemen, policemen, EMTs, and local officials deserve our thanks. Those who serve in Indiana's National Guard, our State Police, and our Department of Homeland Security stepped up, too. From the initial response through the ongoing efforts today, their service has been exemplary.

But it has been concerned citizens—so-called ordinary Americans—who have restored a measure of stability to a region pummeled by forces beyond our control.

There was the bus driver in Henryville who, in the nick of time, rushed dozens of children back to school to protect them from the approaching twister.

There were the EMTs off Interstate 65 who saw a woman thrown from her car, and saved her from being pummeled by hail by dragging a large metal sign across the road and holding it over her. They likely saved her life.

There is Stephanie Decker, a Marysville mother who lost parts of both legs but courageously saved the lives of her two children by covering them with her body as a tornado crushed their home on top of them. We are pulling for you and your family, Stephanie.

There were parents and friends and even strangers across southern Indiana who, as danger approached, took a moment to extend a hand to others, and said, "Come inside, we'll make room."

After the storms left their mark, Hoosiers immediately turned to accounting for loved ones and comforting neighbors.

The damage was, and is, severe. One tornado—by some accounts a half-mile wide—carved a clear path through southern Indiana, ripping trees out of the earth, hurling automobiles and combines long distances, severing power lines, and decimating countless homes and businesses.

Here again, Hoosiers did not sit around and wait for others to help us out. We got to work.

Over the weekend, I spent time surveying the damage and meeting with those who lost the most. Everywhere I visited, I met citizens wearing boots and work gloves who were busily beginning to sort through piles of rubble. I met others who had fired up their chainsaws and were clearing debris from roadways. I saw clusters of cars and pick-up trucks parked outside homes that were hit hardest.

In the aftermath of such a tragedy, one would be forgiven for asking, "Why me?" But I never heard it.

Instead, time and again I heard Hoosiers sympathize with those who lost more than they. And more than one person told me that, in the end, stuff isn't all that important—it's people that are important. And I heard sincere, caring people ask their neighbors, "How can I help?"

At one stop, I met a young couple from Jeffersonville—only 15 miles away—who offered me a drink of water. Their city didn't suffer much damage, so they loaded up their cars with bottled water and granola bars, looking for others who needed a hand.

In Henryville, a pizza shop was mostly destroyed, except for the freezer. The couple who owned it, rather than worrying about the loss of their business, asked officials how they could donate food from the freezer to those who needed it most.

In Marysville, the local Christian Church remains intact, but little else. Pastor Bob Priest told me their decades-old building is no longer structurally sound, but the congregation has never been stronger. As congregants were busy making repairs, I noticed the stained glass window above the church doorway was undamaged. It reads, "In Memory of the Willing Workers."

The local Red Cross chapter opened an overnight shelter, but in the first weekend no one checked in. Instead, friends shared their homes; churches opened their doors . . . everyone, it seems, could count on someone.

For those of us who have seen the scale and scope of destruction up close, we know the path back will not be easy. But we will fix all that Mother Nature broke.

Government at all levels will, and must, be there to help—from local authorities, to the

State of Indiana, to our congressional offices. My staff and I, in particular, are eager to connect our constituents to whatever federal services, and funds, might help them get their lives back on track.

But make no mistake: it will be the people of Indiana—the people of tight-knit communities like Henryville, Marysville, Chelsea, and New Pekin—who will rebuild broken lives.

During these tough times, Hoosiers are reminding us what it means to be a community of citizens—One Nation, Under God, indivisible, come what may. That sense of community has always bound Americans in tough times, and it will get us through this tragedy as well.

This thought especially struck home with me as I visited Henryville High School. The roof of the gymnasium was torn off, some of the walls had collapsed, and the bleachers were demolished. But hanging in the rafters, waving in the breeze, still hung the American flag unscathed.

May God be with those Americans who are putting their lives back together. We are praying for you, and here for you.

HONORING THE LIFE AND SERVICE OF SGT. JUSTIN AVERY EVERETT

HON. JIM COSTA

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 7, 2012

Mr. COSTA. Mr. Speaker, it is with a heavy heart that I rise today with my colleagues, Mr. NUNES and Mr. DENHAM, to honor the life of United States Marine Sgt. Justin Avery Everett. Sergeant Everett passed away Wednesday, February 22, 2012 in a tragic helicopter accident during a night training exercise near Marine Corps Air Station in Yuma, Arizona. He was 33 years old. Sergeant Everett's patriotism, bravery, and selfless service to his country will ensure that his legacy lives on for years to come.

A proud son of California's San Joaquin Valley, Sergeant Everett was born in Chowchilla, California to James and Patsy Everett. Sergeant Everett grew up in Fresno, California with his siblings: James, Jason and Jeremy. He graduated from Reedley High School in 1996 where he won numerous wrestling medals. After high school Sergeant Everett served as a youth group leader at the Church of God Prophecy in Fresno. His commitment to service was evident as a young man. He exemplified a selfless, noble nature and a commitment to a cause greater than his own.

Following the terrorist attacks of September 11th, Sergeant Everett joined the United States Marine Corps in 2002. During his 10 year service, he was deployed on two tours of duty in Iraq. He served as a Pilot and a Crew Chief with the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing aboard a UH-1Y Huey. At the time of his death, Sergeant Everett was preparing for a deployment to Afghanistan in July 2012.

In addition to his legacy as a U.S. Marine, Sergeant Everett will be remembered as a loving son, brother, husband, father, and friend. He is survived by his parents and his brothers, who are also helicopter pilots. Shortly before his death, Sergeant Everett and his wife, Holly, celebrated their 11th wedding anniversary.

The couple have two children, a 5-year-old daughter and a 2-year-old son.

Mr. Speaker, we offer our most heartfelt sympathy and sincere condolences to Sergeant Everett's loved ones. I ask my colleagues to join Mr. NUNES, Mr. DENHAM, and me in honoring his courageous and heroic service in the United States Marine Corps. His dedication to preserving freedom and democracy will be remembered for generations to come.

TESTIMONY FROM BRIAN AHO,
PASSENGER ABOARD THE
"COSTA CONCORDIA" CRUISE
LINER

HON. TIM HOLDEN

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 7, 2012

Mr. HOLDEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to enter sworn testimony into the record from Brian Aho, whose family was among the thousands who experienced the panic and confusion during the evacuation of the *Costa Concordia* class cruise ship on January 13, 2012. Mr. Aho and his family have taken multiple cruise vacations and are familiar with many of the safety procedures that are necessary aboard these large ships. Mr. Aho details the failure of safety measures aboard the *Costa Concordia*, the lack of guidance from the ship's crew, and the absence of accountability demonstrated by the ship's captain. This testimony will hopefully lead to new rules and safety guidelines that can help prevent future catastrophes.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE: Thank you for inviting me to testify today. My name is Brian Aho. My wife, Joan Fleser, my daughter, Alana, and I set sail from the Port of Rome (Civitavecchia) on January 13, 2012, aboard the *Concordia* cruise liner operated by Costa Crociere and its parent company, Carnival Corporation.

Though we have been on many cruise vacations with several cruise lines, this was our first European cruise and our first time sailing with Costa. We chose this particular ship and itinerary for our 20th anniversary cruise because of the opportunity to visit many ports in several countries.

As experienced cruise passengers, we have fallen into a particular embarkation pattern. Once aboard we locate our stateroom, unpack our luggage (if available) and take a walking tour of the ship. We investigate the theater, the pools, the dining-room to which we have been assigned and the safety features. We made note that our stateroom was on Deck #2 forward, our dining room was on Deck #3 aft, and lifeboat access was on Deck #4.

After our investigation, we went back to our stateroom to prepare for a late-seating (9 p.m.) dinner. Once seated—while our appetizers were being served—the ship began to shudder. The rhythmic vibration quickly became worse and, after a tremendous groan and crash, the ship began to list severely. People were falling, glasses and plates were sliding off the tables and smashing, and people were screaming. The panic got worse when the lights failed.

My family formed a three-link chain and we worked our way through the fallen debris toward an outboard gangway leading up to

Deck #4 and the lifeboats. The central (Main) entrance to the dining room was blocked with panicking passengers and crew. The only crew member offering guidance was a woman in a showgirl-style gown near the gangway who was showing the passengers the way to the lifeboats.

Once on Deck #4, people were panicking and fighting over lifejackets. Once I found and delivered one to my wife, another woman damaged it while tearing it out of her arms. The announcements indicated that it was an electrical problem with the generators and everything was under control. Evidence indicates that some passengers were instructed by crew to return to their cabins. As these announcements were made, the ship was listing more and sinking deeper. Immediately after a similar announcement, we heard the abandon ship signal (six short signals and one long signal). Few people knew what it meant as there was no verbal abandon ship announcement.

When a crewmember finally appeared, the panicking passengers pushed their way toward the boat. My wife had to grab my daughter and pull her into the boat as a cowardly man tried to push her out of the way. Once the boat was filled, the crewman had trouble readying and releasing the boat. After much hammering noise, the boat swung away from the *Concordia*. We were showered with white paint chips as if this boat had not been released since the gear had been painted over. After being lowered, the crew had difficulty disconnecting the boat from the davits. Once disconnected, it was clear that the crew did not know how to pilot the lifeboat effectively. It kept colliding with other boats and, eventually, the pier.

There were NO Costa representatives—neither officers nor crew—on the pier to provide guidance to the passengers. The only help we received was from the residents of the island.

As experienced cruise vacation passengers, we have recognized significant problems that, in our opinion, made a terrible situation even worse:

There were no safety drills or instructions distributed to passengers before sailing out into the open Mediterranean Sea.

The public address announcements provided false information.

The manning and deployment of the lifeboats was delayed though the ship was in imminent danger.

The crew was unable to instruct passengers during an emergency.

The crew was unable to launch and operate the lifeboats effectively.

According to reports, the captain and senior staff abandoned the ship with passengers still aboard the capsizing vessel. There was no one aboard to coordinate the evacuation.

This accident was not caused solely by the actions of a single individual. It has been alleged that Costa and its parent corporation, Carnival, allowed Captain Schettino to divert from the assigned course on previous voyages. Clearly, this course deviation was not due to climatic or safety concerns. It is our opinion that—with today's technology—central management of the cruise line must have been able to locate the position of—and track the progress of—a massive liner like the *Concordia*. Either they were aware of its deviation from the pre-determined course and sanctioned it, or they were ill-equipped to manage the operation of this and perhaps other vessels.

The courts will determine who or what organization is to blame for the tragic loss of life in January of 2012 off the coast of Tuscany.