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**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC**

[www.house.gov/franks](http://www.house.gov/franks)

May 5, 2010

The Honorable Robert Gates  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Gates,

We write to express our great concern over the decision made by Army Secretary John McHugh and Army Chief of Staff Gen. George W. Casey Jr. to rescind an invitation to Reverend Franklin Graham to speak at the National Day of Prayer on May 6th, 2010, due to complaints raised and publicized by two special interest groups that object to his Christian beliefs and his criticisms of the Islamic faith. We find this decision misguided for several reasons.

Army spokesman Col. Tom Collins is quoted as saying that Secretary McHugh and General Casey decided "it would be inappropriate for [Reverend Graham] to participate in this inclusive event" because of Graham's comments about Islam.

From its founding, America has possessed a rich heritage of affirming religious expression in the lives of the men and women serving in the armed forces. Indeed, America's founders and a long line of national and military leaders have realized that the strength of America's military lies in the depth of its faith. Commander-in-Chief George Washington regularly issued orders for military troops to attend and participate in religious gatherings. Declaration signer John Witherspoon, a member of the Board of War that oversaw military operations throughout the Revolution, reminded soldiers: "[T]here is no soldier so undaunted as the pious man, no army so formidable as those who are superior to the fear of death."

It is thus intensely troubling that Pentagon officials have now taken it upon themselves to deign what type of Christian belief and expression is "appropriate," and then to censor a patriotic minister, whose own son is serving his fourth tour of duty in Afghanistan, simply because of the objection of an organization that has made it its mission to eradicate open expressions of religious faith from the military. It is highly ironic that it is in the name of religious freedom and "inclusiveness," peaceful religious expression is actually being stifled.

Reverend Graham is one of America's most respected religious leaders, and is beloved by millions of Americans. We understand that not everyone shares Reverend Graham's beliefs about Islam, but the essence of religious liberty is having the right to one's own religious convictions as well as the right to express them. We would like to know for the future by what standard the U.S. military is going to judge what are appropriate religious convictions? Our Founding Fathers understood that religious pluralism did not mean we didn't have disagreements about religion, but that we would disagree peaceably, something Franklin Graham has always done. But now, the U.S. military is putting itself in the position of judging what acceptable belief is. Might the Secretary explain to the Congress just how it will do this?

We do not believe that Reverend Graham's views of Islam should exclude him from this event. If our concept of religious freedom today is based primarily on the desire to placate or avoid criticism offered by suspect organizations, then our constitutional right of freedom of religion is devoid of both meaning and principle.

We ask that you reconsider the decision to revoke Reverend Graham's invitation, and extend to him the opportunity to preach his welcome message to the men and women of our armed forces, and indeed to the Nation at the National Day of Prayer event at the Pentagon.

We look forward to hearing from you very soon.

Sincerely,

cc: President Barack Obama  
John M. McHugh - Secretary of the Army  
Ray Mabus - Secretary of the Navy  
Michael B. Donley - Secretary of the Air Force  
Admiral Michael Mullen - Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff  
General James E. Cartwright - Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff  
General George W. Casey, Jr. - Chief of Staff of the United States Army  
Admiral Gary Roughead - Chief of Naval Operations  
General Norton A. Schwartz - Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force  
General James T. Conway - Commandant of the Marine Corps



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