Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 13, 2013

The Honorable Charles Hagel
Secretary of Defense
Office of the Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Hagel,

Religious freedom is an integral component of America's greatness and has been a vital pillar of our nation from the very beginning. As you noted during the House Armed Services Committee Hearing on April 11, 2013, the protection of religious freedom is fundamental to our country. Congress recognized this fact when it included religious conscience protections for our servicemembers in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

The conscience protections which Congress included in section 533 of the National Defense Authorization Act provided specific religious freedom protections for servicemembers generally and chaplains specifically. The provisions require the Armed Forces to accommodate servicemembers' moral and religious convictions, as long as they do not "threaten good order and discipline." The language also prohibits the military from using an individual's beliefs as the basis for adverse personnel action and ensures that chaplains will not be forced "to perform any rite, ritual, or ceremony that is contrary to [their] conscience, moral principles, or religious beliefs."

Upon signing the NDAA into law, President Obama said the conscience protections were "unnecessary and ill-advised." This statement, coupled with recent events, raises concerns that the military is developing a culture that is hostile to religion. A recently revealed power point presentation used in equal opportunity training to an Army reserve unit in Pennsylvania included evangelical Christians, Catholics, Mormons, Sunni Muslims, and some Jews on a list of religious extremist groups alongside groups like Al Qaeda and Hamas. A memo regarding visitation policies at Walter Reed issued in December 2011 prohibited visitors from bringing Bibles and other religious materials on the premises. A particularly concerning memorandum issued on September 1, 2011, General Norton A. Schwartz prohibited commanders from notifying Airmen about Chaplain Corps programs, stating that only Air Force chaplains are trained to provide leadership on religious matters.

As you acknowledged, these assaults should not be happening. Congress deliberately included religious freedom protections in the NDAA to address this growing pattern of hostility and to protect the constitutionally guaranteed right of religious freedom for our servicemembers and chaplains.

Under section 533, you have been tasked with implementing regulations that carry out the conscience protections passed by Congress. In your testimony you indicated that, you "will comply with all the NDAA directives." As Members of Congress who voted for the inclusion of these protections in the defense policy bill, we are deeply concerned that the Department of

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Defense may have consulted with the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, an organization that is focused on silencing religious freedom in the military, regarding policies affecting these religious freedom rights of our nation's servicemembers.

We request the names of all organizations you are consulting in drafting regulations to comply with the NDAA and the date by which you expect to have the regulations protecting conscience protections, as called for under the law, finalized and implemented.

We appreciate your expressed commitment to addressing this matter. Your leadership as Secretary of Defense is vital to protecting religious liberty in our military. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Doug Lamborn
Member of Congress

Steve Scalise
Member of Congress

Randy Forbes
Member of Congress

John Fleming
Member of Congress

Joe Pitts
Member of Congress

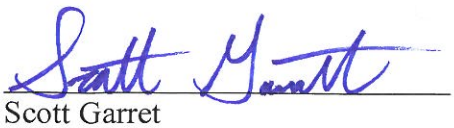
Trent Franks
Member of Congress

Jim Jordan
Member of Congress

Frank Wolf
Member of Congress

Diane Black
Member of Congress

Jack Kingston
Member of Congress



Scott Garret
Member of Congress

Steve King
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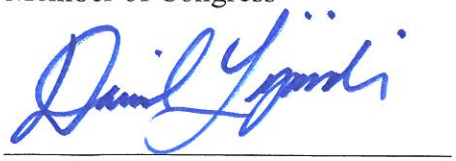

Dan Lipinski
Member of Congress

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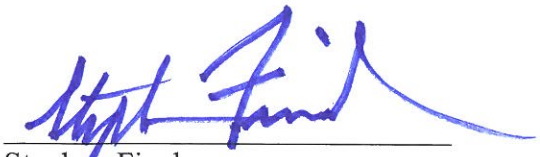
Member of Congress



Stephen Fincher
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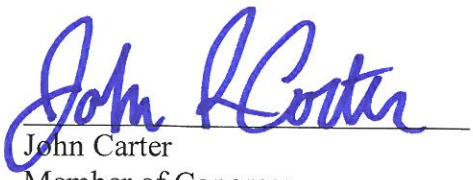

John Carter
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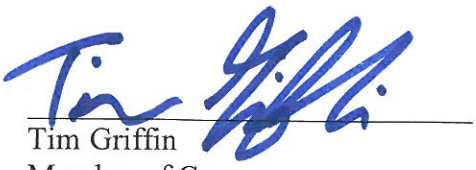

Tim Griffin
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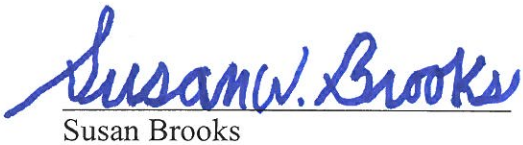

Susan Brooks
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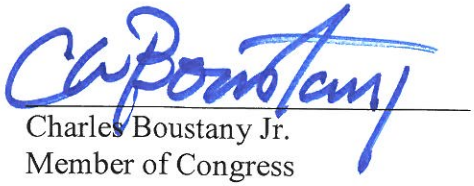

Charles Boustany Jr.
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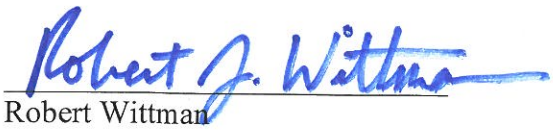

Robert Wittman
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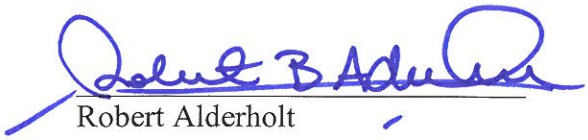

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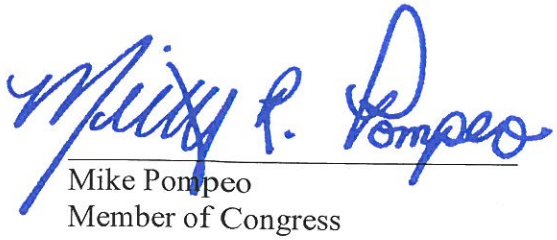

Mike Pompeo
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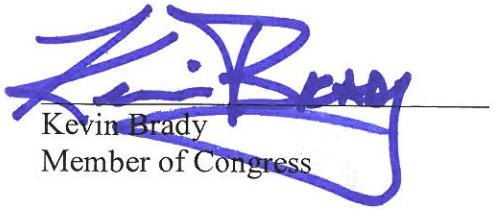

Kevin Brady
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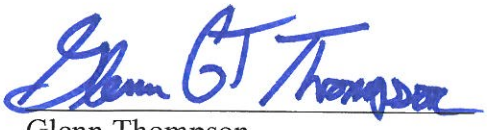

Glenn Thompson
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Luke Messer
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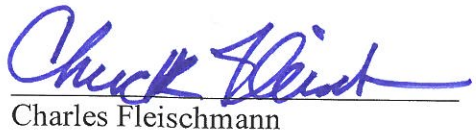

Charles Fleischmann
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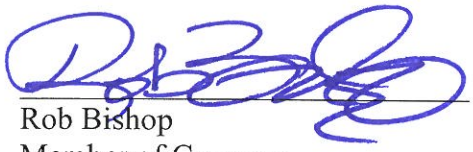

Rob Bishop
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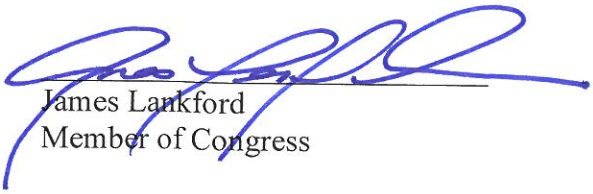

James Lankford
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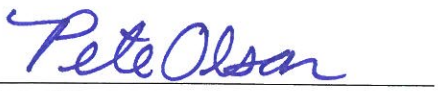
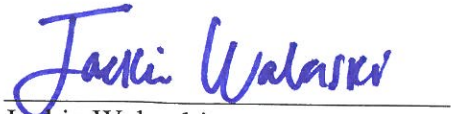


Pete Olson
Member of Congress



Jackie Walorski
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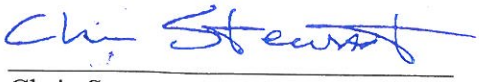
Todd Rokita
Member of Congress



Chris Stewart
Member of Congress

Alan Nunnelee
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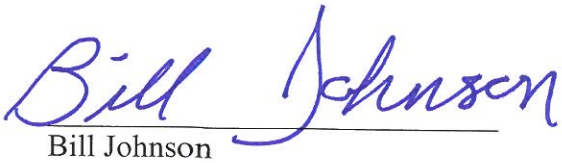

Bill Johnson
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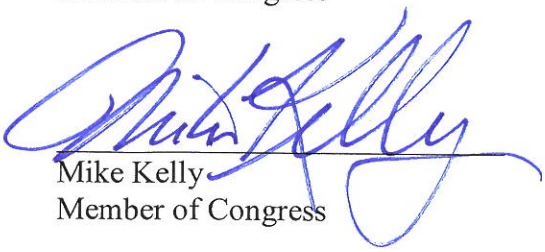
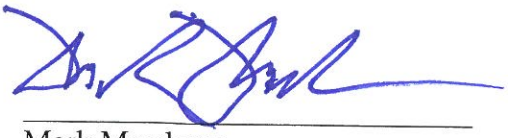
Mo Brooks
Member of Congress

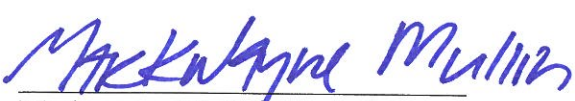
Andy Harris
Member of Congress



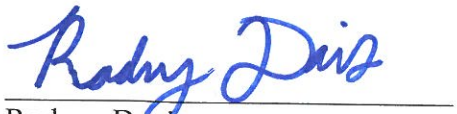
Mike Kelly
Member of Congress



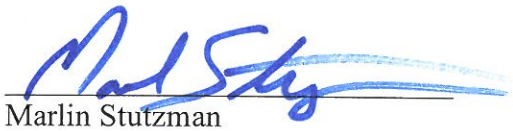
Mark Meadows
Member of Congress



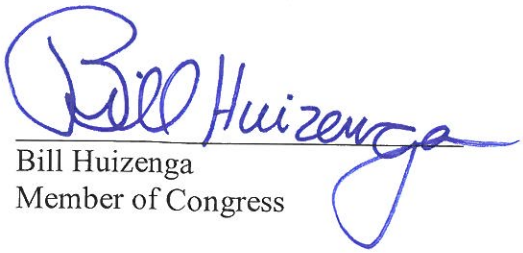
Markwayne Mullin
Member of Congress



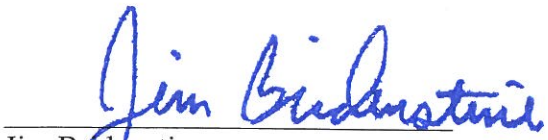
Rodney Davis
Member of Congress



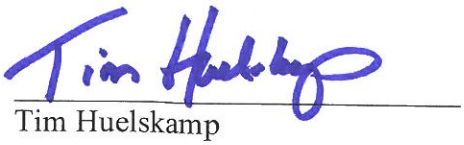
Marlin Stutzman
Member of Congress



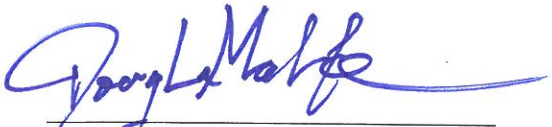
Bill Huizenga
Member of Congress



Jim Bridenstine
Member of Congress



Tim Huelskamp
Member of Congress



Doug LaMalfa
Member of Congress

Robert Pittenger
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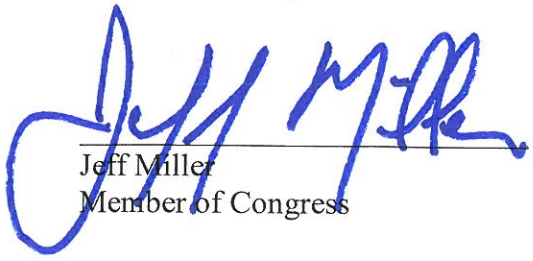
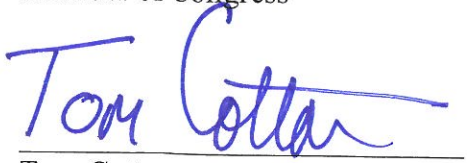
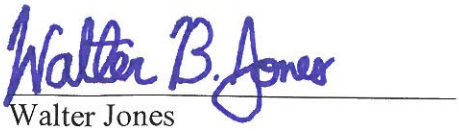


Jeff Miller
Member of Congress



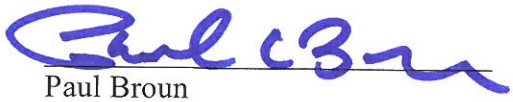
Tom Cotton
Member of Congress



Walter Jones
Member of Congress

Lynn Westmoreland
Member of Congress

Michelle Bachman
Member of Congress



Paul Broun
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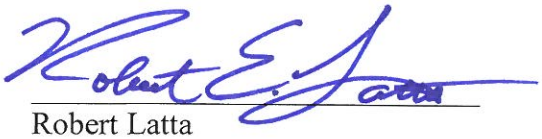
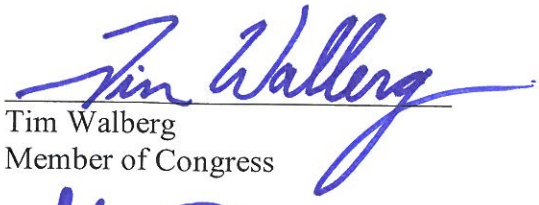
Louie Gohmert
Member of Congress

John Shimkus
Member of Congress



Robert Latta
Member of Congress



Tim Walberg
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Jeb Hensarling
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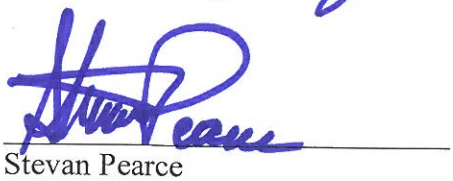
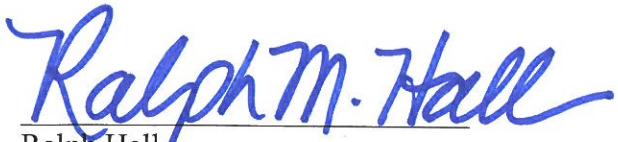


Stevan Pearce
Member of Congress



Ralph Hall
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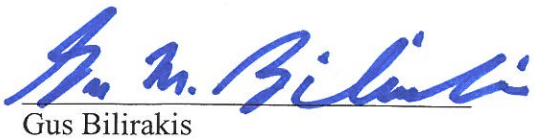

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Joe Wilson
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Joe Barton
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Mike McIntyre
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