

In closing, as I always do, I have signed over 10,000 letters to families who have lost loved ones in Afghanistan and Iraq because I was not strong enough to vote my conscience on the request by the Bush administration to go into Iraq. I have asked God to forgive me by signing these letters, and I think He has forgiven me.

God, please continue to bless our men and women in uniform. God, continue to bless the families of our men and women in uniform. God, in Your loving arms hold the families who have given a child dying for freedom in Afghanistan and Iraq. God, please bless the House and Senate, that we will do what is right in Your eyes for this country. God, please continue to bless the leader of our country. Let him know that he is doing what is right in Your eyes. Three times I ask God, please, God, please, God, please continue to bless America.

FAST AND FURIOUS AND JUSTICE DEPARTMENT STONEWALLING

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. POE) for 5 minutes.

Mr. POE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, when most people think of smuggling, they envision outlaws recklessly sneaking guns, contraband, and money to other outlaws.

Most people would never imagine that the government of the greatest Nation in the world would be engaged in helping a criminal smuggling operation by sending guns and money to narcoterrorists south of our border.

No, this isn't a Hollywood movie. Unfortunately, this has become a reality in Washington, D.C.

□ 1030

The Justice Department, with the aid of the ATF, facilitated the smuggling of over 2,000 weapons to the drug cartels south of the border—the national enemy in Mexico. Reports indicate those weapons were used to kill at least 200 Mexican nationals and two U.S. law enforcement agents.

The Justice Department appears to have gone wild. Instead of enforcing the law, rogue operatives in the Department of Justice seemed to be recklessly encouraging violations of law. Who's responsible for this conduct?

Over a year has gone by since the murder of Brian Terry, border agent, and we still don't know who was in charge. Brian Terry was murdered by one of those Fast and Furious guns. The Attorney General said he was unaware of Fast and Furious. He claims that he either didn't get the memo, or maybe he didn't read the memo.

Well, according to the latest of group of emails sent over to Congress, he did get the email. According to emails sent to Congress Friday night, Arizona U.S. Attorney Dennis Burke notified Eric Holder's deputy chief of staff—via email—about Brian Terry's murder hours after it happened. Later that

day, he notified the Department of Justice that the murder weapon was from Fast and Furious. Imagine that. Holder's staff member implied that he alerted the Attorney General.

So who knew what and when? The Attorney General apparently knew not days or months but hours after that murder occurred. Did he, the Attorney General, know about this operation? Did he approve it? In any event, the Attorney General should resign because it all happened under his watch. He is the one in charge of the Justice Department.

When he appeared before the House Judiciary Committee in December, the Attorney General also told me that he did not know who in his department was responsible for making the decision of Operation Fast and Furious. So is the Attorney General now claiming there is a rogue operation of moles in the Department of Justice that authorized and carried out these smuggling missions? We want to find out.

To coin a phrase from then Senator Hillary Clinton on another subject, the fact that he did not know about this massive operation requires a "willing suspension of disbelief."

The Attorney General is the chief lawyer and law enforcement officer in the country. Whoever did know about this and approved it may have violated U.S. or international law. They need to be held accountable even if it means somebody goes to jail. But that is not the case.

The rogue criminals responsible for carrying out Fast and Furious still work in the Justice Department. These individuals have not been fired or criminally prosecuted for their reckless actions. Some have actually been promoted or transferred. It all looks like an organized, deceitful attempt to hide the stench of Fast and Furious from the American people.

Apparently, the Department of Justice believes in order to catch a criminal, you have to be like a criminal. We need an independent special counsel appointed by the President to investigate the Justice Department and the ATF.

The Department of Justice cannot be trusted to investigate themselves because the agency has lost credibility on this issue. The DOJ has stonewalled providing information to Congress. If the DOJ has nothing to hide, why do they keep hiding information from us? The Justice Department has to be removed from investigating Fast and Furious. Otherwise, Mr. Speaker, this would look like a bunch of burglars sitting on a jury trying a burglary case. That would sort of look bad; wouldn't it?

People died in this reckless, misguided operation. We owe it to the American people and the people of Mexico to get to the bottom of this.

In many States when a person commits an offense, if he recklessly causes the death of an individual, the definition of that offense is called man-

slaughter. Even Washington insiders responsible for Fast and Furious cannot hide from the long arm of American justice because, Mr. Speaker, justice is what we do in this country.

And that's just the way it is.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOMS UNDER ATTACK

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. SCHILLING) for 5 minutes.

Mr. SCHILLING. As we all know, Mr. Speaker, last week was the March for Life here in Washington. Now, as a father of 10, life is a big issue in my house. It's a big issue in other homes and businesses throughout the United States. Thousands of Americans, including some residents of my district, traveled from all corners of the country last week to express their support for the right to life for each human being, to express the desire and passion they have for the born and the unborn.

Just a couple of days later, on Sunday morning, once we had all returned to Illinois, my family and I headed off to church, as we normally do. We sat in the pew and listened to the priest's homily. He read us a letter written by the Bishop of the Diocese of Peoria:

"In the history of the United States, Friday, January 20, 2012, will certainly stand out as a moment of enormous peril for religious liberty," the letter reads, referring to the date the Department of Health and Human Services announced that religious organizations will be forced to provide employees with insurance programs that provide abortifacients, contraceptive services, and sterilization.

The letter continues:

"If these regulations are put into effect, they could close down every Catholic school, hospital, and other public ministries of our church, which is perhaps their underlying intention. What is perfectly clear is that this is a bigoted and blatant attack on the First Amendment rights of every Catholic believer. Under no circumstances, however, will our church ever abandon our unshakable commitment to the gospel of life."

I later learned that this was one of more than 120 letters that bishops had read from the pulpit at masses across the United States.

The letter written by the Bishop of Marquette reads:

"The Federal Government, which claims to be 'of, by, and for the people,' has just dealt a heavy blow to almost a quarter of those people—the Catholic population—and to the millions more who are served by the Catholic faithful."

It later says:

"Our parents and grandparents did not come to these shores to help build America's cities and towns, its infrastructure and institutions, its enterprise and culture only to have their posterity stripped of their God-given rights."

Like many of my Catholic brothers and sisters, I do not believe it is the government's business to target religion and require that its believers violate their conscience and their religious beliefs—or suffer the consequences. I do not believe it is the role of government to persecute religions.

I am proudly and passionately pro-life. But regardless of what your views may be on abortion or contraception, I imagine most Americans would be alarmed to learn of our government chipping away at the First Amendment, mandating its citizens disregard their liberty, convictions, and conscience—or else. This is totally unacceptable. No government should force its citizens to violate their religious beliefs.

I recently joined with a number of my colleagues in urging that the administration reconsider this unprecedented government overreach and violation. But I would go further and encourage the administration to abandon this rule. Abandon this rule and continue to allow these Americans who oppose these services for either moral or religious reasons to live their lives in the way that they see fit and without the fear of punishment.

Bishop Jenky of the Diocese of Peoria concludes his letter by saying:

“This country once fought a revolution to guarantee the freedom, but the time has clearly arrived to strongly assert our fundamental human rights.”

Our religious freedoms are under attack. I was sent here to uphold, protect, and defend the United States Constitution, and I intend to do so.

TRIBUTE TO JOCK MICHAEL SMITH

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Alabama (Ms. SEWELL) for 5 minutes.

Ms. SEWELL. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognize and pay tribute to one of our Nation's most distinguished trial lawyers, an avid sports collector, historian, author, and family man, Attorney Jock Michael Smith.

Attorney Smith was a well-respected member of the Alabama bar, and he was known nationally throughout the legal community for his exceptional legal abilities, his legendary courtroom style, civic activism, and passion for equal justice for all. Sadly, Attorney Smith passed away at his home in Montgomery, Alabama, on January 8 at the age of 63.

The story of Jock Michael Smith is not just one of a notable and accomplished attorney. His story is one of hope, beating the odds, and the fearless pursuit of one's dreams. The life and legacy of Jock Smith is an inspiration to us all.

Despite losing his father tragically at a young age and despite being told in high school that he could not be anything more than a sanitary worker, he did not let that deter him. This young boy, son of a widow, single mother of two, was determined to chart his own course.

Inspired by the memory of his father, Jock developed his oratorical and academic gifts. He graduated with honors from Tuskegee University and then matriculated to the University of Notre Dame School of Law on an academic scholarship.

□ 1040

As a first year law student, Jock founded the Black American Law Students' Association chapter at Notre Dame. He earned his law degree in 1973.

In 1996, Attorney Smith cofounded a partnership with the late renowned attorney, Johnny Cochran. The Cochran Law Firm, as it is known, is actually the law firm of Cochran, Cherry, Givens & Smith. It has 22 offices across this country and continues to be one of the most well-known criminal defense and civil plaintiff law firms in the Nation.

Attorney Smith's remarkable legal career was filled with many record-setting verdicts and settlements. A landmark \$1.6 billion verdict against Southwestern Life Insurance was one of the largest in America's history in 2004. He represented the legacy estates of both Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr., and he represented the Negro League Players and civil rights activist Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth.

During his illustrious career, Attorney Smith's hard work and leadership was acknowledged by numerous awards. He was recognized by the Alabama Trial Lawyers Association for his tireless dedication and unwavering commitment. As an author, Jock Smith shared his amazing life story in an autobiography entitled “Climbing Jacob's Ladder: A Trial Lawyer's Journey on Behalf of ‘the Least of These.’”

Media personality and author Tavis Smiley best summed up the gift he gave us by writing down his memoirs: Jock Smith's story is part of America's story. It's part history lesson and part sermon and 100 percent fascinating. He and lawyers like his late partner, Johnny Cochran, are modern-day knights, using their skills to protect both the poor and defenseless. On a personal level, “Climbing Jacob's Ladder,” his book, shows how faith and hard work can bring great success.

Jock Smith was a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated, and he was the first African American to serve on the board of the President's Advisory Council of the National Wildlife Federation.

Jock Smith was amazing. I know as a young lawyer his life stands as a personal tribute, to me. I am grateful to have known him. I know that I walk in a path that he blazed, and for that, I am eternally grateful to his family. Some of his family members are here with us today in the gallery. He is forever remembered as a remarkable and amazing man. He is survived by his wife of 45 years, Ms. Yvette Smiley-Smith; and his daughter, Janay Smith, who is with us today.

I want to say, in closing, that his life is truly a testament to what is possible

with opportunity—when you take opportunity—and with so many resources. Jock lived life by his favorite quote that he always would say: “Service is the price we pay for the space that we occupy.”

It is with tremendous pride, privilege, and great honor that today I get to recognize the life and legacy of Attorney Jock Smith on the floor of the United States Congress so that all of us can remember that we must pay our fair share for the space that we occupy.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Members are reminded not to make reference to occupants in the gallery.

CONGRESS IS NOT A CAREER

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida (Mr. NUGENT) for 5 minutes.

Mr. NUGENT. Mr. Speaker, we in the House of Representatives need to start restoring the trust that the American people gave when they elected us to this office. Last night, 100 Members voted to give themselves a pay raise. Is that what we're all about? It's not about us enriching ourselves, because I don't believe that's what our Founding Fathers thought.

When I first came to Congress last year, I found out that I had an option to either take the health insurance plan that the Federal Government offered or to go out on my own and do my own thing. And I took the option, even though it cost myself and my family over \$10,000 more. But then we started to look at options with regards to the Federal Employee Retirement System that all Members of Congress are required to be in, and also the Thrift Savings Plan that all Members of Congress are part of, whether they want to be or not—even though it's different for the Senate. The House of Representatives back in the 104th Congress decided that they wanted to take that option away. I think that's wrong. I believe that America is about choices.

I also believe that Congress is not a career. And so when those Members of Congress don't have an option to remove themselves from the Federal Employee Retirement System, as I wanted to, or those Members of Congress that wanted to participate in the Thrift Savings Plan but are told that you, the taxpayers, are going to give us an additional 5 percent of our salary because you like us so much, I asked if I could exempt myself from that. And guess what? We were told we couldn't because those prior to us had made a decision for us now that we couldn't do that, we couldn't do what we think is right for this body.

Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Speaker, it is about doing the right thing. It is about looking back at what our Founding Fathers envisioned for this country. It's about service to this country, not about enriching ourselves on the backs of our fellow countrymen.