

TOMB OF THE UNKNOWNNS

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

Mr. STIVERS. Madam Speaker, I've served for 26 years in the Ohio Army National Guard and had the pleasure of serving with many brave men and women over the years, including a tour of duty in Operation Iraqi Freedom. As a member of the armed services as well as a Member of Congress, I was shocked and horrified last year by reports of the Dover Air Force Base mortuary sending veterans' remains to the Prince George landfill.

The Washington Post reported on December 7, 2011, that they uncovered "976 fragments from 274 servicemembers that were cremated, incinerated and taken to the landfill between 2004 and 2008." This is an outrage. It disrespects our men and women in uniform, and it can't be allowed to stand.

The first step to fixing this is creating a proper memorial for those who have served our country so well and given their last measure of devotion. I'm working on legislation to create a Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery for every conflict moving forward. This plan will be paid for by taking money from the Air Force, because that's where the poor decisions were made. I plan to introduce this legislation very soon.

To those who have given their final measure of devotion in service to our country, they deserve a final resting place worthy of their dedication, commitment, and devotion, and we need to give that to them.

God bless the United States of America.

[From the Washington Post, Dec. 7, 2011]

AIR FORCE DUMPED ASHES OF MORE TROOPS' REMAINS IN VA. LANDFILL THAN ACKNOWLEDGED

(By Craig Whitlock and Mary Pat Flaherty)

The Air Force dumped the incinerated partial remains of at least 274 American troops in a Virginia landfill, far more than the military had acknowledged, before halting the secretive practice three years ago, records show.

The landfill dumping was concealed from families who had authorized the military to dispose of the remains in a dignified and respectful manner, Air Force officials said. There are no plans, they said, to alert those families now.

The Air Force had maintained that it could not estimate how many troops might have had their remains sent to a landfill. The practice was revealed last month by The Washington Post, which was able to document a single case of a soldier whose partial remains were sent to the King George County landfill in Virginia. The new data, for the first time, show the scope of what has become an embarrassing episode for vaunted Dover Air Base, the main port of entry for America's war dead.

The landfill disposals were never formally authorized under military policies or regulations. They also were not disclosed to senior Pentagon officials who conducted a high-level review of cremation policies at the Dover mortuary in 2008, records show.

Air Force and Pentagon officials said last month that determining how many remains

went to the landfill would require searching through the records of more than 6,300 troops whose remains have passed through the mortuary since 2001.

"It would require a massive effort and time to recall records and research individually," Jo Ann Rooney, the Pentagon's acting undersecretary for personnel, wrote in a Nov. 22 letter to Rep. Rush D. Holt (D-N.J.).

Holt, who has pressed the Pentagon for answers on behalf of a constituent whose husband was killed in Iraq, accused the Air Force and Defense Department of hiding the truth.

"What the hell?" Holt said in a phone interview. "We spent millions, tens of millions, to find any trace of soldiers killed, and they're concerned about a 'massive' effort to go back and pull out the files and find out how many soldiers were disrespected this way?" He added: "They just don't want to ask questions or look very hard."

Senior Air Force leaders said there was no intent to deceive. "Absolutely not," said Lt. Gen. Darrell D. Jones, the Air Force's deputy chief of staff for personnel.

This week, after The Post pressed for information contained in the Dover mortuary's electronic database, the Air Force produced a tally based on those records. It showed that 976 fragments from 274 military personnel were cremated, incinerated and taken to the landfill between 2004 and 2008.

An additional group of 1,762 unidentified remains were collected from the battlefield and disposed of in the same manner, the Air Force said. Those fragments could not undergo DNA testing because they had been badly burned or damaged in explosions. The total number of incinerated fragments dumped in the landfill exceeded 2,700.

A separate federal investigation of the mortuary last month, prompted by whistleblower complaints, uncovered "gross mismanagement" and documented how body parts recovered from bomb blasts stacked up in the morgue's coolers for months or years before they were identified and disposed of.

The problems also transpired at a time when the mortuary was shielded from public scrutiny. News coverage of the return of fallen troops to Dover was banned by President George H.W. Bush in 1991 before the first Persian Gulf War. The ban remained until April 2009, when the Obama administration lifted it.

The Air Force said it first cremated the remains and then included those ashes in larger loads of mortuary medical waste that were burned in an incinerator and taken to a landfill. Incinerating medical waste is a common disposal practice but including cremated human ashes is not, according to funeral home directors, regulators and waste haulers.

Air Force officials said they do not know when the landfill disposals began. They said their first record of it is Feb. 23, 2004. The mortuary database became operational in late 2003.

The Air Force said mortuary leaders decided to end the practice in May 2008 because "there was a better way to do it," Jones said. The military now cremates unclaimed and unidentified body parts and buries the ashes at sea.

Jones said the Air Force did not need to inform relatives of troops whose remains ended up in the landfill because they had signed forms stipulating that they did not wish to be notified if additional remains were identified. The forms authorized the military to make "appropriate disposition" of those subsequent remains.

Asked if the landfill was a dignified final resting place, Jones said: "The way we're doing it today is much better."

Gari-Lynn Smith, the widow of an Army sergeant killed in Iraq, said she received an

e-mail in July from Trevor Dean, the mortuary director, saying that incinerated remains had been taken to landfills at least since he began working at Dover in 1996. Dean is one of the officials facing discipline for his role in the reported mismanagement at the mortuary.

Smith's husband, Sgt. 1st Class Scott R. Smith, a member of a bomb-disposal unit, was killed on July 17, 2006. In 2007, she began asking the military what happened to some of his remains that were identified after his funeral.

After four years of letters, phone calls and records requests, she received a letter from the mortuary in April stating that the military cremated and incinerated those partial remains and disposed of them in the King George landfill.

"I hope this information brings some comfort to you during your time of loss," read the letter, signed by Dean.

Smith was infuriated. "They have known that they were doing something disgusting, and they were doing everything they could to keep it from us," she said in a phone interview.

In May 2008, then-Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates ordered a detailed review of policies at Dover after an Army officer complained that the mortuary had cremated a fallen comrade at a nearby funeral home that also cremated pets in a separate chamber.

The review team ordered changes, emphasizing the need to ensure the highest levels of dignity and honor.

The Pentagon would not release the report, which was overseen by David Chu, who was undersecretary of defense for personnel. A copy obtained by The Post, however, shows that the landfill disposal practice was never reviewed or mentioned. Chu, now president of the Institute for Defense Analyses in Alexandria, declined to comment.

Private contractors hired by the Air Force to handle the remains' incineration and disposal of the residue said they were unaware that they were transporting the ashes of dead troops. Records show that the Air Force hired the contractors to dispose of medical waste and did not specify that cremated body parts were included.

MedTrace Inc. of North East, Md., had Air Force disposal contracts between 2004 and 2007, records show. Don Holland, a manager for the company, said his employees picked up boxes of sealed containers from the Dover mortuary.

"They were certified as medical waste that had been properly treated—that's it," Holland said. "We don't go looking at what's in there. It's sealed."

MedTrace took the items to an incinerator in Baltimore, according to state records in Delaware, where the mortuary is located. Holland declined to discuss the incineration and which landfill his company used.

Lisa Kardell, a spokeswoman for Waste Management, which operates the King George landfill, said the firm has no record of a contract with MedTrace for the years 2003 through 2008.

She said that Air Force officials have not returned calls over the past two weeks from her company's attorneys, asking which haulers would have been handling the Dover materials and the disposition of the ashes.

"Obviously, we would be opposed to taking cremated remains of our servicemen and servicewomen and putting them in our landfill," Kardell said. "But it sounds like a lot of us were pulled in unknowingly to this unfortunate situation with the Air Force," she added.

"It's a moral thing," said Jeff Jenkins, the manager of the King George landfill. "Someone killed overseas fighting for our country,

I wouldn't want them buried—any part of them—in the landfill.”

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH AND A WOMAN'S RIGHT TO CHOOSE

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

Ms. RICHARDSON. In this month of March, as we celebrate Women's History Month, I would like to take a moment to recognize some of our great female leaders who, throughout history, have persevered in the face of monumental opposition and successfully have accomplished great things on behalf of the American people.

From the words of the great poet, Maya Angelou, from the beautiful singing voice of Marian Anderson, from the tireless activism of Dolores Huerta, to the groundbreaking leadership of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, and, of course, our own Democratic leader NANCY PELOSI, these women and many more have played an integral role in the history in this Nation.

Madam Speaker, every day, women take great strides to help others and to improve the quality of life for everyone. Unfortunately, in matters involving health care, women are still facing these challenges. Whether it's on the Senate floor last week during a debate on the Blunt amendment or whether it's during a House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform hearing, women continue to face unwarranted attacks on their reproductive health rights and their access to contraceptives.

More disconcerting, these debates and veiled attacks have escalated beyond misguided attempts to repeal the Affordable Care Act. Now they've taken aim at restricting women's choices in the area of reproductive health altogether. This is wrong. Medical decisions about a woman's health must leave the political arena and be left to the discretion of the patient and their doctor, not employers, and certainly not the government.

It is astonishing and disappointing that more than 50 years after the landmark Supreme Court decision in *Griswold v. Connecticut*, a decision which found that women have a constitutional right to use contraceptives, continued attacks on women's rights of privacy and health care still persist, and at an alarming rate.

The American people want us to work towards addressing their top priority: creating jobs, not their reproductive rights. However, this Congress seems to be more focused on bringing forward legislation that targets women's access to basic health care. In this Congress alone, we've taken eight votes on antiwomen health legislation.

A 2011 Guttmacher Institute study found that over 90 percent of women, and over 90 percent of Catholic women, between the ages of 15 and 44 have used

some sort of birth control at some point during their lives. Birth control can cost up to \$600 a year. So for a college student, a woman who's had multiple children and is still in child-bearing years, low-income women or those who are underinsured, insurance coverage means the difference between accessing contraceptive services or not.

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Quite simply, Madam Speaker, all women should have the choice and access to contraception and have the resources no matter where they work, where they live, or where they go to college. This is why I'm proud to support President Obama's Affordable Care Act, which I voted on, which will make a positive impact on women and children in their access to health care and greatly decrease the number of women and their families who are uninsured or underinsured.

Studies have shown that women who have health insurance don't always receive the medical care they need because their policies don't cover certain services or the women simply can't afford the high deductibles and copayments. The Affordable Care Act changes this unfortunate reality by assisting women in gaining access to basic preventive health care in order to prevent life-threatening diseases in the future.

Our country is facing great challenges. People need jobs. Students need affordable education. Seniors and working families need affordable health care. But one thing we don't need is to continue to waste time debating extreme legislation that is dangerous to women's health, disrespects the judgment of American women, and is nothing less than the most comprehensive and radical assault on women's health in our lifetime.

Madam Speaker, as people all over America pay tribute during the month of March to the generations of women who have committed to progress and have proved invaluable assets to our society, let us in Congress renew our commitment to support women—not with certificates at banquets, but by working to ensure equal treatment of all women in society, providing women with equal access to health care, and protecting women's rights, and their families, to choose once and for all their own health care.

HOOSIERS MAKE INDIANA PROUD

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

Mr. YOUNG of Indiana. Madam 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 what it means to be part of a community.

Over the course of several hours, fierce winds, softball-sized hail, and

deadly tornados 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: 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 a 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 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 find 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 didn't sit around and wait for others to help us out. We got to work.

Now, over the weekend I spent time surveying the damage and meeting with those who lost the most. Everywhere I visited, I met citizens wearing work boots and work gloves who were busily beginning to sort through the piles of rubble. I met others who had fired up their chainsaws and were clearing debris from roadways. I saw clusters of cars and pickup 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 doesn't really matter; it's people that are important.

I heard sincere, caring people ask their neighbors: How can I help? In