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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1406

March 8, 2010

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The Honorable Robert M. Gates
Secretary, United States Department of Defense
Pentagon, Room 3E880
Washington, DC 20301-1000

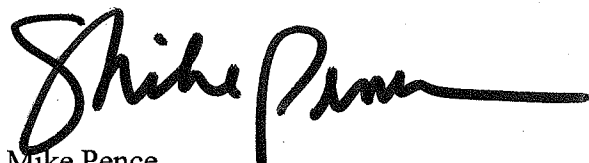
Dear Secretary Gates:

As you know, Mr. Tony Perkins, President of the Family Research Council (FRC), was invited to speak at the National Prayer Luncheon at Andrews Air Force Base which took place on February 25, 2010. Mr. Perkins, a veteran Marine Officer, has been a leader in defending religious freedom through years of ministry. Having personally known Mr. Perkins during my time in Congress, I can think of few better suited to address such an audience. I was surprised and concerned to learn that Mr. Perkins' invitation to speak at the event was rescinded due to statements made on the FRC website.

It is my understanding that the focus of this year's annual Air Force Prayer Luncheon was centered on deployed personnel, families, and prayer. As such, it was not a political event, but a ministry event aimed at supporting the spiritual and emotional needs of our nation's soldiers. It is unclear which statements on the FRC website warranted a rescission of Mr. Perkins' speaking invitation, but I am gravely concerned at the implications this action has on First Amendment freedoms. It could potentially set a dangerous precedent of repression and exclusion based on privately held beliefs at odds with current Administration policies.

I respectfully request a detailed explanation of why Mr. Perkins' speaking invitation was rescinded. Additionally, I request an explanation of the Air Force's policies for inviting speakers for military and ministry events, and under what circumstances invitations may be revoked. I thank you for your prompt reply and attention to this serious matter.

Sincerely,



Mike Pence
Member of Congress

Cc: Mr. Michael Donley, Secretary, United States Air Force
Lt Col Gary Bertsch, Chaplain, Andrews Air Force Base