

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 5, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Recently our offices were contacted by the family of an Indiana Reservist who died while serving his country in Iraq. Specialist Chancellor A. Keesling was on his second tour of duty to Iraq and assigned to the 961st Engineer Company stationed near Baghdad. On June 19th, Specialist Keesling apparently took his own life; another casualty of the growing epidemic of military suicide.

The family of Specialist Keesling has been informed, correctly or incorrectly, that it is not Administration's policy to send letters of condolences to the families of soldiers who commit suicide. They have appealed to us to urge you to reconsider this policy and to treat these deaths, unless there are exigent circumstances, as equal to a combat fatality. We respectfully ask you to read the enclosed letter from Spcl. Keesling's father Greg Keesling, and to give the family's request all due consideration.

We thank you in advance for your personal time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Dan Burton  
Member of Congress



André Carson  
Member of Congress

Enclosure



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August 3, 2009

President Barack Obama  
Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington D.C.

Dear Mr. President,

I am writing to ask you to change your policy of writing letters of condolence only to the families of soldiers who die in the war theatre of combat injuries.

Our 25-year-old son, Army Spec. Chancellor (Chance) Keesling, took his own life while deployed to Iraq June 19, 2009. He is one of 137 similar tragedies that have occurred in 2009 as the pressures of multiple deployments take their toll on our military. He was just a few weeks into his second deployment with the 961<sup>st</sup> Engineering Brigade.

It has been especially heartening for us in that the military has treated his death as equal to a combat fatality. I believe we have Major General Graham among others to thank for this enlightened policy. For as our casualty officer said to us – “I believe your son would not have killed himself if he was not in the war theatre.” We believe this also.

We are determined to wrest purpose from this tragedy by bringing the issue of military suicide to the forefront of national attention and to ensure that no other community of friends and family need endure the unique form of suffering a suicide leaves in its wake. The outpouring of support from the Indianapolis community has been unparalleled – the Mayor of Indianapolis, Gregory Ballard spoke at our son’s funeral and Congressman Andre’ Carson attended. Both Indiana Senators Evan Bayh and Richard Lugar sent staff to be with us and offer their condolences and Senator Bayh’s staff continues to work with us on the various issues we have identified that we hope the military will look into. Congressman Dan Burton and Congressman Carson have jointly written to General Casey with the hope of bringing changes that will save other soldier’s lives. Governor Mitch Daniels reached out to us personally and provided counseling services for our son’s girlfriend since she was not eligible for military counseling services. The widow of Indiana Governor Frank O’Bannon, Judy O’Bannon, is making a PBS documentary about our son and the growing tragedy of military suicide. Finally, and perhaps most inspiring to me is that over 200 ex-offenders that we employ and serve in our reentry program voted to name the facility where they work the “Chancellor A. Keesling Reentry and Recycling Facility.”

As you can see by the above, we have had the good fortune to have a wide and deep support network. However, other families may not enjoy such support. In such a case,

the recognition of the president could have a profound impact on the family of the suicide victim. Thus, we beseech you to reach out to military families who have lost a son or daughter to suicide.

Please change the policy to give families the dignity they deserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gregg Keesling". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Gregg" and last name "Keesling" clearly distinguishable.

Gregg Keesling  
President  
Workforce, Inc.  
[gkeesling@work-force-inc.com](mailto:gkeesling@work-force-inc.com)