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Mother of United States Marine Corps. Sergeant Andrew Paul Tahmooressi
Open Hearing Committee on Foreign Affairs,
held by Subcommittee Western Hemisphere

Wednesday, October 1, 2014

“Subject Sergeant Tahmooressi: Our Marine in Mexican Custody”

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee: Thank you for the invitation to testify today. I am grateful for the committee’s interest regarding Sergeant Tahmooressi and his ongoing incarceration in Mexico.

As a mother of a high achieving young man, there are a few horrific memorable quotes I recall and wish to share with you regarding my son. I believe these quotes will not only frame the character of my son Andrew yet will also highlight the current predicament my son is in:

- 2006- “Mom. I’m scheduled for my solo flight for my private pilot license” (Age 17).
- 2007- “Mom. I’m going to hold off on my Florida Bright College Scholarship as I wish to first experience commercial fishing in Kodiak Alaska” (Age 18).
- 2008- “Mom. God just nudged me to join the military. I’ll be enlisting as a Marine
“(Age 19).
- 2010- “Mom. We just hit an I.E.D.”
- 2012- “Mom. I blacked out when I fell from atop an M-Rap”.
- 2013- “Mom. I’m dropping out of my Professional Pilot Bachelor Degree at Embry Riddle Aeronautical University because I can’t concentrate on the course work”.
- 2014- March 31, 11:25pm “Mom. I got lost and made a wrong turn. I’m at the Mexican border surrounded by military. I need you to know in case anything happens to me”.
- 2014- April 1, 9:30am “Mom. I’ve been arrested. Please secure an attorney for me”.
- 2014- April 5- “Mom. I am not going to make it through the night. There are hit men in the cell with me and they told me they are going to kill me. Whatever you do, do not come down to ask questions or investigate because they are going to kill you to. Change your bank accounts and go underground. Your life is in danger”.
- 2014- April 14- “Mom. I tried to kill myself because the guards and the inmates were going to rape, torture and eventually execute me for information”.
- 2014- May 1- “Mom. I have been chained by 4 points, strapped spread eagle to the bed in the infirmary for 25 days”.

These quotes, horrific in varying degrees for a mother pale in comparison to Andrew’s statement that, “his time in Mexico imprisonment has been by far worse than the two combat tours in Afghanistan”. Andrew is under contract with the U.S.M.C. Individual Ready Reserve as an In-active Reservist until August 24, 2016 having been honorably discharged active duty 10/2012. Serving unselfishly in Operation Enduring Freedom, multiple combat tours 2010-2012, being meritoriously promoted on the

battlefield in Feb. 2012, Andrew felt “privileged to serve the war on terror”. He fought in an infantry battalion, as a section lead and 50 caliber gunner. He volunteered and was willing to lose his life for freedom, liberty and elimination of oppression. He fought not for one political party, yet for the world at large, including Mexico who does not send their military to foreign combat.

Suffering symptoms suggestive of combat related Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) throughout 2013 while attending University, Andrew headed out from Florida to California to seek evaluation and treatment at the San Diego Veteran’s Administration. This decision was made when a Marine brother who served with Andrew in the 2010 deployment to the Helmand province of Afghanistan, a purple heart veteran who himself was receiving care at the San Diego Veterans Administration suggested Andrew get treatment in San Diego. Andrew packed up most all of his possessions and moved to San Diego receiving a documented positive PTSD screen in the San Diego, La Jolla Village V.A. Hospital March 12, 2014. A treatment plan was prescribed which included a March 20th orientation program that Andrew attended as documented in his VA medical record as well as an additional note on March 31.

At 10:30pm, on March 31, 2014 Andrew pulls out of a parking lot in the San Ysidro California border town, a stone throw away from the Mexican border, with his possessions piled high in the back seat of the four- door truck having not yet secured permanent housing and makes one wrong turn. That one wrong turn nearly cost his life and certainly his freedom. The highway on ramp he believed led north to San Diego, a sign off to the side of the ramp laden with graffiti suddenly and unknowingly blind swept in a curve to the south and straight into a barricaded Mexico entry lane. With no visible sign indicating how to turn around and with no USA presence at the border, Andrew purposefully stops at the first Mexican official he sees and explains, “I got lost, made a wrong turn and ended up here by mistake. I have all my possessions in the truck including three USA legally purchased and registered firearms. Can you show me how to get back to the border”? In addition he calls 9-1-1 for help. The Mexican Custom agent as well as the California 9-1-1 operator could not or would not assist Andrew back to the USA side of border. These facts are recorded in his evidentiary statement in the Federal Court in Tijuana Mexico.

Arrested on weapon and ammunition possession and now incarcerated in a Mexican prison, Andrew is despondent and desperate to be released back to the USA. His PTSD treatment plan has been aborted as Mexico does not have the ability to provide combat related PTSD expressive group therapy, recognized as standard rehabilitation in the USA. As often as possible, Andrew phones home via a collect call to seek hope that he will soon be freed. The White House.gov, We The People petition garnered the necessary 100,000 signatures within the thirty day allotment of time on May 30th, the threshold requiring a response from the White House yet it wasn’t until August 28th, almost 90 days later that a response was emailed to me; the same response that the other 134,000+ signers received. The White House expressed their interest in urging Mexico to expedite the judicial process. To date, the urgency of the executive branch to influence expediency, in my opinion is ineffective.

I respectfully request the Chair and members of this committee to seek cooperation with Mexico for an escalated and expeditious judicial process since as today, October 1, 2014 six months have passed and the presiding Judge has yet to receive

critical evidence to support Andrew's unintentional border crossing which includes, 1) the 9-1-1 call- transcript authenticated through the USA-Mexico Chain of Custody, 2) the prosecutors expert testimony of Andrew's PTSD and, 3) forensic scene documentation at the border 3/31 at 10:30pm noting the conditions which led to the navigational error and entrapment. Today, there is new signage at both points of vulnerability protecting wayward drivers including, a prominent and visible sign which states, "RETURN TO THE USA <<<<<<" erected in May and the graffiti laden sign has been replaced. Should Andrew or any motorist for that matter make the same navigational error that Andrew made at night on 3/31, a way back home to the USA is now afforded via the signage, "RETURN TO THE USA <<<<<<"; clearly, not the case on 3/31/2014.

Mr. Chairman. I urge attention and collaborative action among the United States and Mexico for an expedient resolution of Andrew's Mexican judicial process expecting whole-heartedly that release to the U.S.A. is justified. My son is despondent and has been without treatment since his navigational error on 3/31/2014, mere days from his March 12, 2014 diagnosed Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) at the San Diego Veterans Administration Hospital.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

Jim Johnson