

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Ed Royce (R-CA), Chairman
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere Hearing on
“Sergeant Andrew Tahmooressi: Our Marine in Mexican Custody”
October 1, 2014**

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Thank you Chairman Salmon for your leadership shown by convening this important hearing to discuss the ongoing case of Marine Sgt. Andrew Tahmooressi. This Committee has worked hard at exercising oversight of the role the State Department plays in aiding Americans abroad, has been aggressive in defense of this American in trouble abroad, while being respectful of our important relationship with Mexico. But Andrew has been in jail since March. The bottom line is that this Marine needs to be home, now.

This case is important. As Members of Congress, we must see to it that U.S. servicemen and women who are put in harm's way to defend our country are properly cared for when they return home injured, as is Andrew's case. Mrs. Tahmooressi, I am pleased that you are here with us today to share your thoughts on your son's detention. This hasn't been easy for you, we know. I traveled to Tecate, Mexico in June to visit your son, spent almost an hour with him, and came away from that visit even more committed to helping Andrew get back home to receive the PTSD treatment he needs and deserves. This is the least we can do for his service.

Sgt. Andrew Tahmooressi is a brave Marine who served *two* combat tours in Afghanistan. During his time deployed to Helmand province with the 2nd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, Andrew received a combat meritorious promotion – a battlefield promotion under meritorious conditions. This rarely happens, and is a testament to Andrew's valor and love of country. To discuss his service, it is an honor to have Marine Sgt. Robert Buchanan here to testify. I met Robert at my office in Orange County, California where I learned that he served with Andrew in Afghanistan. He is now a veterans advocate, having earned the Purple Heart after sustaining injuries himself from an IED explosion. Robert, thank you for travelling to Washington. We are all looking forward to hearing your testimony about your friend, Sgt Tahmooressi, with whom you served on the front lines.

As many know, Andrew suffered physical injuries as a result of an IED explosion during his deployment in Afghanistan, as well as psychological injuries in the form of combat PTSD. The San Diego Veterans Affairs hospital diagnosed Andrew with combat PTSD less than ten days prior to his arrest at the Mexican border. Andrew's PTSD has resulted in hyper-vigilance, memory and cognition lapses, and depression. When I learned that Andrew had attempted to harm himself while held at the over-crowded and dangerous La Mesa Penitentiary in Tijuana, it was clear to me that he would not be able to receive the specialized treatment he needs as long as he's held in Mexico.

It is because of this that I, together with Congressman Salmon, visited Andrew, and have pressed for his release, most recently asking the Attorney General of Mexico to consider the extenuating circumstances of Andrew's combat related PTSD, a condition requiring specific expertise not available in Mexico. Last week I had a good and productive conversation with the Mexican Attorney General and am confident that a humanitarian release of Andrew will occur very soon so he can start getting better.