

## Calif. congressmen ask Bush to review denied medal

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AP MILITARY AFFAIRS WRITER

**SAN DIEGO (AP)** — A California congressional delegation asked President Bush on Friday to posthumously award the Medal of Honor to a Marine who was chosen to receive only the second-highest medal the Navy can bestow for valor.

The delegation, spearheaded by Rep. Duncan Hunter, sent a letter asking for a review of the case of Sgt. Rafael Peralta, who witnesses say covered a grenade with his body to save comrades on

Nov. 15, 2004, during fighting in Fallujah, Iraq. Already wounded by gunfire, he died immediately.

A copy of the letter given to The Associated Press was signed by a bipartisan group of five other representatives and Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer. It urges Bush to award the nation's highest honor, the same medal he gave to Marine Cpl. Jason L. Dunham, who was killed in 2004 after covering a grenade with his helmet.

"Intentionally absorbing a grenade blast to protect one's comrades in arms has been traditionally recognized by awarding the Medal of Honor. The sacrifice of Sergeant Peralta manifests the same devotion to one's comrade's and country as that displayed by Jason Dunham," the letter said.

The White House had no immediate comment Friday.

The bipartisan delegation formed after Peralta's mother said publicly this week that she was told her son would be awarded the Navy Cross, rather than the Medal of Honor, because the nomination was tainted by reports he was accidentally shot by a fellow Marine shortly before an insurgent lobbed the grenade.

"It's difficult as a mother to lose your son, but it's good that people are remembering him. He was a person who gave everything and took nothing," Rosa Peralta said after the AP informed her of the congressional effort.

"I'm very pleased to hear this news; we wanted justice," she said.

Bush singled out the Marine's actions in a 2005 Memorial Day speech, saying Peralta "understood that America faces dangerous enemies, and he knew the sacrifices required to defeat

them."

The question of whether to award Peralta the Medal of Honor centers on whether the mortally wounded Marine, who had been shot in the head and upper body during a house-to-house search, could have intentionally reached for the grenade and covered it with his body.

The initial recommendation that he receive the Medal of Honor went through reviews by the Marine Corps, U.S. Central Command, the Department of the Navy and, ultimately, Defense Secretary Robert Gates.

After all the evidence was scrutinized, officials determined the nomination did not meet the standard necessary to support the Medal of Honor, said Capt. Beci Brenton, spokeswoman for Navy Secretary Donald Winter.

Defense Department officials have said that because there was some contradictory evidence, Gates took the extra step of asking for a review by a panel consisting of a former commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, a Medal of Honor recipient, a civilian neurosurgeon who is retired from the military and two forensic pathologists who also are military retirees.

The panel recommended against the Medal of Honor, and Gates made the decision this month, officials said.

Peralta, 25, was assigned to Hawaii's 1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment. He had moved to San Diego from Tijuana as a teenager.

Associated Press writers Erica Werner in Washington and Elliot Spagat in San Diego contributed to this report.

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students.

"There is a very idealistic aspect to this — the idea that 'I am living in this world, and it could be a better place,' " Riegelman said. "This is a student-driven movement. The drive is not just intellectual, it is passionate as well."

Kelly Gebo, an infectious-diseases physician who directs the public health major at Johns Hopkins, said that in the past, college students who wanted to do something about global health were limited to collecting money, sending it to UNICEF and hoping for the best.

"Now they can get on a plane, get off in Cape Town and help out in a clinic," she said. "They aren't happy with just collecting pennies."

Joanna Stephens fits that description well.

A fifth-year senior at William and Mary in Williamsburg, Va., Stephens, 21, spent two spring vacations helping deliver medicines to a charity in Ghana. The team of 16 students — she led one of the trips — raised money during the year to pay for the drugs. The receiving clinic was run by Ghanaian health workers. "We were not dropping out of the sky with American doctors," she said.

The project was one of 16 international service trips open to William and Mary students. Others went to Belize, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic.

Last winter, Stephens, of Fairfax

Station, Va., struck out on her own. She found a community development organization in Gvozd, Croatia, and asked by e-mail whether it took interns. A woman in charge said she could come.

Stephens rented a room, cooked her own meals and got a Croatian tutor. She put together a hygiene course for young children and helped around the office. She spent Christmas and the winter term there and hopes to return.

"It was an amazing experience. The people were so welcoming," she said last summer while working in Washington at the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation. But, she added, "It is important to make sure that the work you're doing is actually needed."

Stephens' parents are immigrants from South Africa, so she has a personal interest in that country. In the summer of 2007, she got a \$3,000 grant to live in Johannesburg and research the relationship between public health and apartheid. On the side, she did her own epidemiological study.

Although her major is international relations, Stephens has also completed pre-med requirements and is applying to medical school. She realizes that public health may not have the cachet there that she and her friends see in it.

"Surgical procedures are perceived by our society as glamorous. Vaccination programs are not seen as glamorous," she said.

But that doesn't bother her a bit.

## Bill to sell prison land to Penn State will expire

**BELLEFONTE, Pa. (AP)** — A central Pennsylvania legislator says a bill to sell more than 1,100 acres of land near Rockview state prison to Penn State University will be allowed to die in a Senate committee.

To keep the bill alive would require passing it before the end of the General Assembly's session on Nov. 30. State Sen. Jake Corman says that doesn't allow time to complete the planning for the use of the farmland and forest acreage.

Penn State Associate Dean Bruce McPherson expressed disappointment. As state agricultural experiment station director, he says the property is an ideal research site.

Corman says legislation can be resubmitted after public input is fully considered and planning is finalized. The process is being led by a Pittsburgh consulting company and is expected to be completed in February or March.

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