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**On the release of Cuban physician &
freedom activist Dr. Oscar Biscet**

‘Castro Has Not Succeeded in Crushing the Spirit of Dr. Biscet’

HON. CHRIS SMITH OF NEW JERSEY
(*Excerpts*)

I thank my very good friend and colleague for yielding.

I do raise my voice today, and I join my friend from Texas and others in a bit of a celebration--although it needs to be a cautious celebration because the tyranny on the island of Cuba continues unabated for so many others. But Nobel Peace Prize nominee Dr. Oscar Biscet of Cuba, one of the bravest and brightest human rights defenders on Earth, was released on March 11 from a wretched Cuban prison where he had endured 8 years of torture with periods of solitary confinement

for his exemplary human rights work. It was Dr. Biscet's second long-term, totally unjustified incarceration by Cuba, by Castro, totaling almost 12 years in prison. According to his wife, Elsa Morejón, he was arrested at least 27 periods and jailed for short periods of time between 1998 and 1999 alone, yet he persisted and has an indomitable will that continues to this day. Dr. Biscet's release and that of other prisoners of conscience was negotiated and announced by Cardinal Jaime Ortega, archbishop of Havana.

Yesterday, I had the high honor and the privilege to speak by phone with Dr. Biscet who is still in Cuba. And I conveyed my and, I would say, our collective respect,

admiration, and abiding concern for his welfare and well-being as well as that of his wife. He said during the conversation that she was pleasantly shocked and very happy to finally have him home. I let him know that he and his amazing work was never and will never be forgotten.

Awarded the U.S. Medal of Freedom by President George W. Bush, Dr. Biscet suffered the depravity of Castro's infamous gulag in order to bring the rule of just law, respect for human rights, and a robust democracy to Cuba.

In our phone conversation, he absolutely insisted that freedom will and must be procured only through peaceful means, and of course that work is far from finished. He said that faith in God was paramount and that "prayer is of utmost importance." He is truly a man of God.

Dr. Biscet, an OB/GYN, told me that the truth about what Castro has done to his people and continues to do must reach--these are his words--the truth must reach the Cuban people, and he singled out Radio Martí as a valuable means to that end.

"Were you tortured?" I asked him. He said last night, "Yes, yes." And his multiple serious health conditions that must now be addressed obviously are testimony to the cruel and severe mistreatment that he suffered. He told me that in prison, he had to eat putrefied food and rice that was laced with worms. He endured solitary confinement with a mentally ill person, survived a dungeon with a knife-throwing criminal, and withstood burns all over his body from the prison's kitchen exhaust pipe that emptied into his cell. The Cuban Government even attempted to take him for shock therapy at a mental institution in order to rid him of his passion for human rights. None of it worked. And by

the grace of God, he has persevered with unparalleled bravery.

Freedom House has ranked Cuba as one of the least free countries in the world. The only country which ranked lower on the freedom scale than Cuba was the nightmare gulag of North Korea. Yet in an insane paradox, the Cuban tyrants remain romantic heroes for many in the United States, including some Members of this Congress who in 2009 visited Cuba and gushed with admiration for the dictators Fidel and Raul Castro, showing no compassion for the pain their courting and their enabling of Castro gave to all those suffering under his dictatorship.

Castro has not succeeded in crushing the spirit of Dr. Biscet. That same spirit and vision animates the so-called ladies in white, Las Damas de Blanco, the wives and relatives of imprisoned political dissidents like Dr. Biscet who attend mass each week and march through the streets dressed in white to symbolize peaceful dissent. Cuban police have detained and beaten these women for their peaceful protest.

And lest anyone construe Dr. Biscet's release as the harbinger of immediate peace and respect for human rights in Cuba, consider this: Yesterday Amnesty International published an alert that noted that "the repression of Cuban dissidents persists despite the releases." I will put the entire statement in. But they point out that numerous, numerous activists, new activists, men and women who are speaking out for human rights are now being rounded up, put under house arrest, and some held in detention.

They pointed out that on February 23, on the one-year anniversary of a great man named Tamayo's death, according to the

Cuban Commission on Human Rights, the authorities placed over 50 people under house arrest before freeing them hours later. And the president of the Cuban Youth Movement for Democracy was arrested after organizing an activist meeting. Where? Inside his own home. And he now has been arrested.

Dr. Biscet hopefully will receive the Nobel Peace Prize. As my friend and colleague knows, we have really orchestrated an effort all over the world--parliamentarians

were gladly writing in letters, including the Prime Minister of Hungary, asking the distinguished body that gives out the Peace Prize to consider Dr. Biscet and hopefully the other Cuban dissidents for that prize. Liu Xiaobo got it last year. He couldn't travel. They put the Peace Prize on the empty chair. Dr. Biscet is out of prison, and it would be a great lifting of spirits and hopes for the people of Cuba for that Peace Prize committee to award him.