

Faith Digest

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Bill would limit protests. A bipartisan group of senators has introduced a bill that would make it harder for protesters from a fringe church in Topeka, Kan., to protest outside military funerals. [The Sanctity of Eternal Rest for Veterans Act](#), introduced by Sen. Olympia Snowe, R-Maine, comes in the wake of the Supreme Court's 8-1 decision in March upholding the right of Westboro Baptist Church to picket military funerals. The bill would increase the "quiet time" before and after services from one hour to two hours and expand the protest buffer zone around a funeral from 150 feet to 300 feet. The buffer zone around access routes to and from the funeral would also grow from 300 feet to 500 feet. Westboro protesters have demonstrated outside military funerals with signs that say "Thank God for Dead Soldiers," calling U.S. casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan divine punishment for tolerance of homosexuality. The bill, which has seven Democratic co-sponsors and six Republicans, also is supported by military groups including AMVETS, Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Military Order of the Purple Heart. Attorney Margie J. Phelps, daughter of Westboro founder Fred Phelps, has said her small church stands ready to "quadruple" its number of funeral protests.

Worker who burned Quran reinstated. A New Jersey Transit employee fired for burning pages of the Quran at the site of a proposed Islamic center near Ground Zero will get his job back. Derek Fenton, who sparked a national firestorm during his protest on the anniversary of the 9/11 terror attacks last year, will be reassigned to his \$86,110-a-year job, get \$25,000 for pain and suffering, and receive back pay for every day since he was fired. Fenton had joined a protest in Lower Manhattan at the site of a planned Islamic center, where he removed and burned three pages of the Quran. At the time, he was off duty and did not publicly link himself to the

transit agency.

Toxic drywall taxes Katrina relief. Relief organizations whose volunteers built or repaired hundreds of damaged houses after Hurricane Katrina have found they installed toxic Chinese drywall in more than 200 buildings, requiring hundreds of low-income families to move out for months while the houses are gutted anew and rebuilt. For relief organizations, which have decided to shoulder the full cost of millions of dollars in repairs, doubling back to gut and rebuild old homes is a major budget setback that cuts into their future work. In class-action suits in federal court in New Orleans, people whose new or repaired homes were ruined described how sulfurous Chinese sheetrock emitted vapors that corroded electrical wiring; ruined the circuitry of air conditioners, appliances, computers and televisions; tarnished jewelry and other metals; pitted mirrors and sometimes made their homes stink of rotten eggs. [Habitat for Humanity](#), Catholic Charities' Operation Helping Hands and Rebuilding Together New Orleans all have launched programs to identify tainted homes, move homeowners out, sustain them for months and make the houses safe for occupancy.

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