

CONGRESSMAN MATT GAETZ
FLORIDA'S FIRST DISTRICT



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Congressman Gaetz to Honor Local Veteran & Philanthropist

Monday, March 12, 2018 | 9:00am

Congressman Matt Gaetz will honor two local heroes who demonstrated great courage and selflessness.

Christian Oakes of Santa Rosa Beach will be presented with a Congressional Record for his efforts in aiding survivors during Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria in 2017.

Vietnam veteran, and USAF Technical Sergeant, John Thomas of Pensacola will be presented with a series of awards for his hard work and dedication while serving our country.

Background:

Christian Oakes, 35, has helped with recovery efforts for Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria.

Soon after Oakes and his wife married in August of 2017, they loaded up donated supplies from various business clients around Santa Rosa Beach and headed to Texas to help Hurricane Harvey survivors. They performed rescues and distributed supplies to the hardest hit areas.

In the wake of Hurricane Irma, Oakes setup relief operation efforts in Southwest Florida, and quickly sprang into action in hard hit communities around Naples, FL. After seeing cars stagnant on jammed highways, Oakes invested his energy into air operations. He worked with Florida State Rep. Byron Donalds to reopen local airports to fly in much needed supplies.

Like Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, Oakes rushed to hard-hit Puerto Rico following Hurricane Maria. With help from Congressman Gaetz, Oakes was able to cut through bureaucratic red tape to get volunteers and more than 8-million pounds of relief supplies to the island, including 500 influenza vaccines. While in and around Puerto Rico's hardest hit areas, Oakes also managed to get a mobile medical unit to Vieques, a small island just east of the main island of Puerto Rico heavily impacted by the storm.

TSgt. John Thomas, 80, a Vietnam veteran, served honorably in the United States Air Force from 1955 to 1975. In 1966, in the midst of his career, an Air Force Senior Master Sergeant credited Thomas' work ethic. "His willingness to work and devotion to duty are but two of his many outstanding qualities" said Bobby Warren, SMSgt. USAF.

Thomas has earned the following awards and honors throughout his decorated military career: *Air Force Good Conduct Medal, Good Conduct Medal (Army), Air Force Outstanding Unit Award, Air Force Longevity Service Award Ribbon, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Small Arms Expert Marksmanship Ribbon.*

The media is invited to cover these events, and ask questions immediately after its conclusion.

Escambia County Board of County Commission Chambers | 9:00 – 10:00am

221 Palafox Pl, Pensacola, FL 32502

For more information, please contact Digital Director, Kavontae Smalls (850) 503-1382.

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