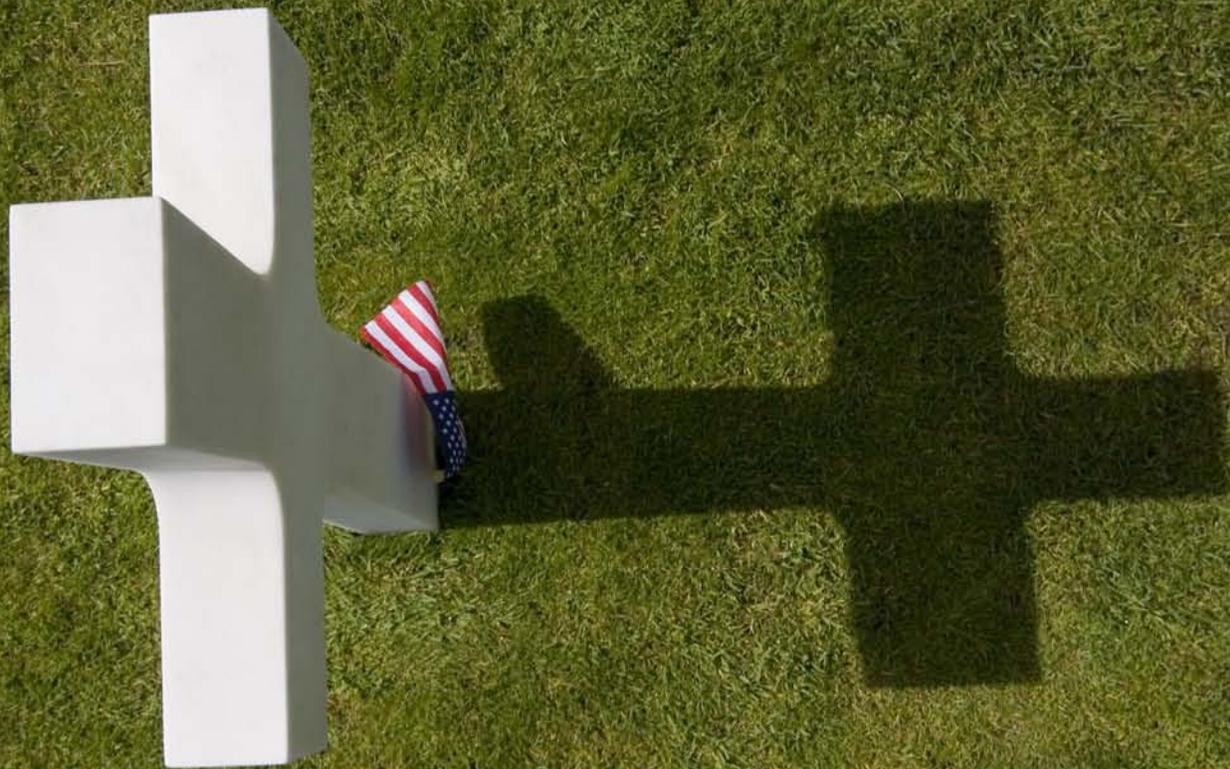


**A CLEAR AND
PRESENT
DANGER:**



The Threat to Religious Liberty
in the Military

Introduction

The Armed Forces of the United States have defended this nation for well over two and a quarter centuries. The soldiers, sailors, Marines, airmen, and Coast Guardsmen who have been injured, wounded, and killed in defense of our country often have been very committed to their faith in God. Should it be surprising that those who face serious injury and death so regularly might focus more consciously on matters of eternity? It seems only natural that the gravity of military life should lead to serious consideration of spiritual matters.

Military life is hard and dangerous. It requires a level of focus and endurance – physical, mental, and spiritual – that simply is not required of many other occupations. Consequently, one would expect that those who pursue a military life must attain to a higher level of self-discipline than their civilian counterparts.

In this, as in many areas of life, George Washington is a towering example of what it means to be a great soldier in a republic. Washington was extremely disciplined and deeply religious. These traits were not merely coincidental. Rather, they were self-reinforcing. So it is with members of the modern Armed Forces. Religious conviction is not merely an add-on belief, it is like a strand in a rope that complements the others while greatly increasing strength.

Military life in the United States has always had a strong religious component for the reasons given above but also, as Alexis de Tocqueville noted, because Americans have been and continue to be a genuinely religious people. Rather than being divisive, the strong religious presence in the United States military has had a unifying effect. In the times of greatest peril to life and limb, it is a great comfort to know that many of those with whom your life is entrusted share a commitment to each other, to the United States, and to God. Simply put, devotion to moral principles derived from a Higher Power allows for a greater level of trust to exist among members of the military.

Therefore, it is with great unease that we at the Family Research Council (FRC) have noted a growing hostility to religion within the armed services in the last decade. Unfortunately, pressures to impose a secular, anti-religious culture on our nation's military services have intensified tremendously during the Obama Administration. This pressure exists across the armed services, but it has become extremely acute in the United States Air Force (USAF). The Air Force has had the great misfortune to be targeted by anti-Christian activists. Regrettably, some of the highest-level officers within the Air Force appear to be cooperating with this effort, and those in the other military branches are feeling its effects as well.

What follows is a list of discrete events presenting a larger picture of the threat to religious liberty that now exists in America's armed forces. The examples provided represent only a portion of the concerted efforts to scrub the military of religious expression, through which the chilling effect of punishment and potential career destruction lie at the back of everyone's mind.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tony Perkins".

Tony Perkins
President, FRC



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William G. Boykin".

Lt. Gen. (Ret.) William G. "Jerry" Boykin
Executive Vice President, FRC

Casey Weinstein – 2004

USAF Academy grad (1977) and attorney, Michael “Mikey” Weinstein’s son, Casey, was a USAF Academy cadet at this time. Casey complained that flyers that were placed on all cadets’ breakfast plates advertising Mel Gibson’s “The Passion of the Christ.” Distribution of the flyers stopped after that. (In 2005, Mikey Weinstein founded the Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF), headquartered in Albuquerque, NM).¹

Weinstein emerges as a major critic of the USAF Academy – February 19, 2005

Mikey Weinstein emerged as a critic of the Air Force Academy and appeared on *Good Morning America*. Weinstein warned: “What you’ve got is a lusty and thriving religious intolerance that is objectively manifesting itself in prejudice and discrimination and is obliterating the First Amendment, civil rights and the US Constitution.” According to Weinstein one group in particular posed a risk at the Academy: “There are senior people that view evangelical Christianity at the Air Force Academy the way that you and I would view gravity. Pick up a pen and drop it and it falls on the desk. Well, it just exists, it’s gravity.”²

Air Force Superintendent General John Rosa responds – February 19, 2005

After apologetically telling the *Good Morning America* audience that misdeeds had taken place at the Academy, the Superintendent, General John Rosa, presciently warned of an overreaction that could threaten religious liberty.³

Weinstein complains about USAF Academy course on religious sensitivity – May 2005

In response to critiques from Weinstein and others, the Air Force created a task force to review the religious climate at the Academy. The Air Force sent a warning about “religious respect” to all installations worldwide, and the Academy started a course, “Respecting the Spiritual Values of All People” (RSVP) that, as described by the *Washington Post*, made a good-faith effort to correct problems at the school. Weinstein called this effort “putting lipstick on a pig” and blamed the religious climate on “a leadership that encourages the evangelicals and tolerates bias.”⁴

USAF Academy Task Force reviews Academy’s religious policies – June 22, 2005

The Task Force found no widespread religious discrimination at the Air Force Academy.⁵ However, some cadets and staff were deemed insensitive to various religious beliefs.⁶ Weinstein responded by saying the Academy’s religious climate is “Inquisition 2.0,” and charged that evangelical Christians have “weaponized the gospel of Jesus Christ.”⁷

Weinstein sues the Air Force – October 2005

Weinstein sues the USAF alleging “severe, systemic and pervasive” religious discrimination in that service.⁸ In particular he objected to a statement by Brig. Gen. Cecil R. Richardson in the July 12th *New York Times* saying, “We will not proselytize, but we reserve the right to evangelize the unchurched.”⁹

Weinstein dismissed – October 26, 2006

Weinstein’s suit is dismissed by U.S. Judge James A. Parker in Albuquerque, New Mexico, because “it contained only vague allegations that the academy is biased in favor of evangelical Christians and improperly allowed evangelizing. Parker also ruled the group of graduates making the allegations lacked legal standing to bring the claims.”¹⁰

Christian Embassy targeted by anti-Christian group – December 2006

Weinstein asked for—and received—a Department of Defense Inspector General investigation of seven officers who appeared in a video for Christian Embassy ministry. The Inspector General concluded in August 2007¹¹ that the video was inappropriate, but Weinstein was not satisfied. After seeing the IG's report, Weinstein told *Beliefnet* that even though the Air Force suggested corrective actions MRFF “wanted to see courts martial.”¹² In its press release MRFF also stated, “MRFF intends to file expeditiously a comprehensive Federal lawsuit that will rapaciously pursue legal remedies to the multitude of horrific Constitutional violations this DoD/IG report reveals.”^{13, 14}

Anti-Christian leader finds an ally in the USAF: Chief of Staff – February 2009

Early in President Obama's first term, in a major turning point for Weinstein's relationship with military leaders, he met with Air Force Chief of Staff Norton A. Schwartz. Weinstein said that Schwartz “acknowledged that there [was] a problem” regarding religious freedom in the military.¹⁵

Anti-Christian Group Praises USAF Leadership – December 2009

In a sharp turnaround from the previous four years, by the end of 2009 Weinstein was praising Air Force leadership. The Academy Superintendent complimented Weinstein as well.¹⁶

Calling Commissioner Gordon – February 2010

As a measure of how cozy the relationship between Weinstein and the Air Force Academy Superintendent, Lt. Gen. Mike Gould, had become, Weinstein and Gould devised a secret code word to ensure that Weinstein could have instant access to Gould. “We have our own bat-signal,” Weinstein boasted.¹⁷

Conservative Religious Leader Disinvited to Air Force Base – February 25, 2010

Family Research Council President Tony Perkins, a Marine Veteran and ordained minister was disinvited to address the National Prayer Luncheon at Andrews Air Force Base outside Washington, D.C. after he spoke publicly in opposition to the Obama Administration's effort to repeal the ban on open homosexuality in the military. The invitation was revoked even though Mr. Perkins had made clear he had planned to give a devotional, non-political message.^{18, 19}

International Ministry Leader Disinvited to Pentagon – May 6, 2010

Franklin Graham, son of Billy Graham, and President of the international relief ministry, Samaritan's Purse, was disinvited to the Pentagon's National Day of Prayer service by the Army because of his comments about Islam. His invitation was revoked because Graham referred to Islam as an evil religion and “horrid” for its treatment of women. Graham expressed regret for the decision, but still has strong support for the military.²⁰

Christian prayers banned at military funerals – July 26, 2011

After going undercover, U.S. Rep. John Culberson (R-TX) determined that the Houston National Cemetery was preventing Christian prayers from being said at military funerals. Culberson stated that he had “witnessed volunteer members of the honor guard from the Veterans of Foreign Wars being prohibited from using any references to God.”²¹

Air Force pulls ethics course from curriculum at air base – July 27, 2011

For 20 years, an ethics training course for nuclear missile officers was conducted by a chaplain at Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif. It included texts from the Bible and materials related to just war theory by Saint Augustine. This course was pulled for “thorough review” by the Air Force primarily due to its use of Christian reading materials.²²

Air Force Chief of Staff chills religious speech in service-wide memo – September 1, 2011

Chief of Staff Gen. Norton Schwartz issued a service-wide memo entitled, “Maintaining Government Neutrality Regarding Religion.” Schwartz wrote: “Leaders at all levels must balance Constitutional protections for an individual’s free exercise of religion or other personal beliefs and its prohibition against governmental establishment of religion.” For example, they must avoid the actual or apparent use of their position to promote their personal religious beliefs to their subordinates. “Commanders ... who engage in such behavior may cause members to doubt their impartiality and objectivity. The potential result is a degradation of the unit’s morale, good order and discipline.” In the 9/1/11 memo, Schwartz also warned commanders against open support of chaplain-run events stating that they “must refrain from appearing to officially endorse religion generally or any particular religion.” He adds, “Therefore, I expect chaplains, not commanders, to notify Airmen of Chaplain Corps programs.” Finally, Schwartz advises anyone who has concerns “involving the preservation of government neutrality regarding religious beliefs” to contact a military attorney.^{23, 24, 25}

Walter Reed Medical Center bans Bibles and religious material – September 14, 2011

Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, the leading medical institution for the U.S. armed forces, issued an official patient and visitor policy banning Bibles. It stated, “No religious items (i.e. Bibles, reading material, and/or artifacts) are allowed to be given away or used during a visit.”²⁶ The policy was revoked after a political firestorm erupted in the House of Representatives.^{27, 28}

Air Force Academy apologizes for its promotion of Christmas charity – November 3, 2011

Air Force Academy Commandant of Cadets, Brig. Gen. Richard Clark, called Mikey Weinstein to apologize for a Cadet Wing email that promoted Operation Christmas Child (OCC), a charity that sends toys and toiletries to millions of needy children around the world at Christmas. OCC is affiliated with Rev. Franklin Graham’s, Samaritan Purse. Clark released a statement explaining the Academy’s retraction of its support stating that “[u]nder orders from Air Force headquarters ... only the Chaplain Corps is responsible for advertising faith-based programs.” (This incident followed the Schwartz memo by two months, see above.)²⁹

Anti-Christian Group threatens suit over nativity and menorah on Travis Air Force Base – December 18, 2011

The MRFF threatened to sue Travis Air Force Base (Solano County, California) for including a nativity scene and menorah in their holiday display. The MRFF claimed the display violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. The Air Force Base refused to remove the display, finding it did not violate the Constitution.³⁰

Army censors Catholic chaplains in worship services – January 29, 2012

The Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Military Services issued a letter to Catholic chaplains to be read to their military parishioners across the armed services. The clergy asked them to resist implementation of the HHS contraceptive and sterilization mandate in Obamacare. A similar request was made across America to civilian parishioners that Sunday. However, this request did

not reach the ears of those in the Army. As a statement issued by the Archdiocese explained, the Army letter was distributed but not read publicly, after collaboration between the Archdiocese and the Secretary of the Army led to the deletion of a sentence from its text.³¹ Kathryn Jean Lopez of *National Review Online* observed, "So not only were chaplains told not to read the letter, but an Obama administration official edited a pastoral letter."³²

Air Force removes "God" from unit's logo – February 7, 2012

The Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers complained to the Air Force about a logo from the Rapid Capabilities Office. It used to read in Latin "Doing God's Work with Other People's Money" and was changed to "Doing Miracles with Other People's Money." Rep. Randy Forbes (R-VA) and 35 other lawmakers sent a letter to Air Force Secretary Michael Donley and Air Force Chief of Staff Norton Schwartz demanding an explanation for the removal of a non-religious reference to God. The Air Force said they would investigate. "It is most egregious," as Rep. Forbes told Fox News, "The Air Force is taking the tone that you can't even use the word 'God.'"³³

Army General withdraws from speaking at West Point after protest for anti-Christian groups– February 8, 2012

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and the Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF) launched a campaign to bar Lt. Gen. Jerry Boykin (USA-ret.), a founding member of the Army's Delta Force and former Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence, from speaking at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. CAIR and MRFF said their opposition was based upon Gen. Boykin's "Islamophobic" comments.³⁴ Gen. Boykin voluntarily withdrew from speaking at the event, stating in an interview with *OneNewsNow* that the pressure on the Academy, which the Obama Administration did not resist, was overpowering.³⁵

Army labels Evangelical Christians and Catholics Extremists – March 2012

As part of a presentation on extremism at a Pennsylvania Army Reserve Equal Opportunity training brief on extremism the instructor included "Evangelical Christianity" and "Catholicism," as examples of religious extremism. The list also included Al Qaeda, Hamas, Islamophobia and the KKK. When asked where she obtained her information, she referred to the Southern Poverty Law Center, an anti-Christian political organization. Upon learning of this incident, the Catholic Archdiocese for the Military Services stated it was "astounded that Catholics were listed alongside groups that are, by their very mission and nature, violent and extremist."^{36, 37}

Weinstein claims credit for cessation of Bible sales – June 12, 2012

Weinstein took credit for the Pentagon putting an end to the sale of military-themed Bibles. For example, *The Marine's Bible* used the Holman Christian Standard Bible as its translation and contained a "Special Prayer and Devotional Section for Marine Personnel." The cover contained a picture of the Marine Corps Seal, part of a flag blowing in the wind, and scenes of combat with a red transparent overlay. The Pentagon claimed trademark problems were to blame, but Weinstein took credit for the revocation and called the Bibles a "national security threat." Sales of such Bibles had begun during the presidential administration of George W. Bush.³⁸

West Point study links pro-life groups to terrorism – November 2012

Dr. Arie Perliger of the United States Military Academy, while analyzing "right-wing extremism," compared pro-life groups to the KKK and Neo-Nazi groups. The study, titled "Challengers from the

Sidelines: Understanding America's Violent Far-Right,"³⁹ claimed that radical right-wing ideology is grounded, in part, on the principle that "since every human being is created in the image of God, it is by definition a sin to end their lives before they have been able to 'enjoy love and life of this planet,'" (p. 38). With respect to anti-abortion attacks, Perlinger observes that "pro-life violence is driven by several ideological building blocks that are enhanced by religious-based convictions, i.e., fetuses are human beings created in God's image, and as such should be accorded the rights of humans from the moment of conception; any violent acts to end their lives are immoral and should be prevented," (p. 38).^{40, 41}

Army removes cross and steeple from chapel – January 24, 2013 (date of news story)

The U.S. military ordered soldiers to take down a steeple and board-up the cross-shaped windows of a chapel at remote Forward Operating Base Orgun-E in Afghanistan. The soldiers were required to keep the chapel religiously neutral. In 2011, a similar situation occurred where soldiers were forced to remove a cross at a chapel at Camp Marmal, Afghanistan.^{42, 43}

Anti-Christian indoctrination via email at Fort Campbell, KY – April 10, 2013

Todd Starnes of Fox News revealed an internal e-mail from an Army Lt. Colonel at Fort Campbell, KY (home of 101st Airborne Div.), advising three dozen subordinates to be on the lookout for soldiers who might be members of "domestic hate groups." Family Research Council was listed as an "Anti-Gay" group along with American Family Association. While commenting about the groups that were singled out, the e-mail warned that they, "do not share our Army Values."⁴⁴

Weinstein meets with top Air Force officials at the Pentagon – April 23, 2013

Three representatives of MRFF (Mikey Weinstein, Larry Wilkerson [former chief of staff to Colin Powell], and Ambassador Joe Wilson [husband of Valerie Plame]) met with several high-ranking Air Force officials along with USAF staff members to hear various complaints about military life and religious observance. Weinstein told Sally Quinn (*Washington Post*) in an interview after the Pentagon meeting that Christian "proselytizing" is a "national security threat." He added, "What is happening [aside from sexual assault] is a spiritual rape.... it is sedition and treason. It should be punished." Quinn noted that the three men were speaking of proselytizing by "'dominionist' or fundamentalist evangelical Christians."⁴⁵

Sally Quinn's column in the *Washington Post* discusses the Weinstein-USAF meeting – April 26, 2013

Sally Quinn, long-time columnist, reported that the "Air Force published, but has yet to distribute, a 27-page document, which includes a cover sheet that states: 'COMPLIANCE WITH THIS PUBLICATION IS MANDATORY.'" Quinn was referring to manual AFI 1-1 (see below, May 2013) that made a number of potentially troubling statements regarding the free exercise of religion. For example, it condemned not just the "actual" but also the "apparent" use of one's position to promote one's religious beliefs. It also indicated noncompliance could result in court martial." Weinstein observed to Quinn: "You need a half a dozen court-martials real quick."⁴⁶

After meeting with Weinstein, Pentagon confirms policy – April 30, 2013

The Pentagon confirmed to Fox News that Christian evangelism is against regulations. In a written statement to Fox News, Lt. Commander Nate Christensen said, "Religious proselytization is not permitted within the Department of Defense." He declined to say if anyone had been prosecuted due to this policy.⁴⁷

Air Force officer told to remove Bible from desk– May 2, 2013

Air Force personnel had been told that they might express their beliefs as long as they do not “make others uncomfortable.” This rule led to an officer being asked to remove a copy of the Bible from his desk. According to the Fox News report the “officer was told he could no longer keep a Bible on his desk because it ‘[might]’ appear that he was condoning a particular religion.”⁴⁸

Air Force statement – May 2, 2013

“When on duty or in an official capacity, Air Force members are free to express their personal religious beliefs as long as it does not make others uncomfortable.... Proselytizing (inducing someone to convert to one’s faith) goes over that line.”

- Lt. Col. Laurel Tingley, in a statement to Fox News⁴⁹

Department of Defense statement – May 2, 2013

“The U.S. Department of Defense has never and will never single out a particular religious group for persecution or prosecution.... Service members can share their faith (evangelize), but must not force unwanted, intrusive attempts to convert others of any faith or no faith to one’s beliefs (proselytization).”⁵⁰

Coast Guard Rear Admiral speaks at National Day of Prayer event – May 2, 2013

Coast Guard Rear Admiral William Lee spoke at a National Day of Prayer event as “a man of deep abiding faith who happens to wear a uniform.” Lee addressed the issue of religious freedom in the military describing an occasion on which he gave a Bible to a Coast Guardsman who tried to commit suicide. “The lawyers tell me that if I do that, I’m crossing the line,” Lee said. “I’m so glad I’ve crossed that line so many times.”⁵¹

Air Force releases AFI 1-1 – May 2013

The Air Force manual “Air Force Instruction 1-1” (AFI 1-1) was internally released in August 2012 but distribution to all airmen as a paper pocket copy started in May 2013. Section 2.11, “Government Neutrality Regarding Religion,” contains language consonant with Mikey Weinstein’s comments after his April 23rd meeting at the Pentagon with high-ranking USAF officials.^{52, 53}

A painting including a Bible verse is removed – May 31, 2013

Weinstein complained to the Pentagon about an inspirational painting in the dining hall of Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho. It focused on a depiction of a policeman and included a Scripture citation and the image of a cross. The painting is reportedly removed 56 minutes later.⁵⁴

A soldier is punished for serving Chick-fil-A – June 5, 2013

Army Master Sergeant, Nathan Sommers, was punished for serving Chick-fil-A sandwiches at his own promotion party in honor of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). Sommers was investigated, reprimanded, threatened with judicial action, and given a bad efficiency report. The invitation said, “In honor of my promotion and in honor of the Defense of Marriage Act, I’m serving Chick-fil-A sandwiches at my promotion party.” Sommers was told that “he [was] no longer a team player and was not performing up to standards.” Chick-fil-A and DOMA were frowned upon.⁵⁵

Fleming Amendment is adopted – June 5, 2013

The House Armed Services Committee adopted an amendment by Rep. John Fleming (R-LA) to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The Fleming Amendment protects the rights of armed

services members to hold, act upon, and practice freely their religious beliefs as long as they do not interfere with any Constitutional liberties of others.^{56, 57}

Air Force removes video that mentions God – June 7, 2013

The Pentagon directed the Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, in Trenton, New Jersey, to take down a video that mentioned “God” because it might be offensive. It read: “On the eighth day, God looked down on His creation and said, ‘I need someone who will take care of the Airmen.’ So God created a First Sergeant.” The video was modeled after a Super Bowl commercial and clearly was made to honor First Sergeants. “Proliferation [sic] of religion is not allowed in the Air Force or military.” The chief of the Air Force News Service Division questioned how “an Agnostic, Atheist or Muslim serving in the military [would] take this video,” and recommended not using it at all.⁵⁸

Obama “strongly objects” to Fleming Amendment – June 11, 2013

On June 11th, after the House Armed Services Committee approved its version of the NDAA (H.R. 1960) with Rep. Fleming’s language, a White House Statement of Administration Policy was issued indicating that the President’s senior advisers would recommend a veto because they strongly object “to section 530, which would require the Armed Forces to accommodate, except in cases of military necessity, ‘actions and speech’ reflecting the ‘conscience, moral principles, or religious beliefs of the member,’ ...[and which] would have a significant adverse effect on good order, discipline, morale, and mission accomplishment.”^{59, 60, 61}

Senate Armed Services approves similar rights of conscience language – June 13, 2013

FRC has been told by Senate Republicans that the Senate Armed Services Committee included language similar to the H.R. 1960 protections in its version of the National Defense Authorization Act. The bill was passed out of Committee on June 13, 2013.⁶²

In closing:

James Madison once described religious freedom as the “lustre of our country.” The examples presented above should give us great concern that we have entered a period in which members of the armed services are being subjected to speech codes and restrictions on the free exercise of religion. We recognize that there must be a healthy respect for the beliefs of members of all faiths and those who are not believers, yet concurrently affirm that religious expression is a right foundational to our Constitution, which those being penalized have sworn with their lives to uphold.

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