



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on June 25, 2012

Congressmen Ask Defense Secretary to Halt Air Force Attack on Religious Faith

Sixty-six members of Congress have penned a letter to Defense Secretary Leon Panetta asking him to address what they say is an “alarming pattern of attacks on faith in the Air Force.” According to the [Air Force Times](#), the congressmen blame [Air Force Chief of Staff Norman Schwartz](#) (a member of the internationalist Council on Foreign Relations, pictured at far right) for cultivating the attack on religious expression, which they say includes removing Latin references to God in an Air Force unit logo, deleting Christian references from a missile training course, taking Bibles off an Air Force accommodations checklist, and prohibiting commanders from informing Air Force service members about Chaplain Corps programs.



“When our sons and daughters join the military, they are not signing away their First Amendment right to religious liberty,” the congressmen said in their epistle to Panetta. “Unfortunately it seems that some parts of the military are intent on prohibiting religious expressions rather than protecting it.”

The congressional protest is being led by Representative Randy Forbes (R-Va., pictured to the left of Schwartz), who said in a statement: “The Air Force has repeatedly capitulated to demands from groups that seek to remove all traces of faith from the military and the public square.... Those who sacrifice so much for our nation must be assured that they need not leave their faith at home when they volunteer to serve.”

The 66 congressmen pointed to a [September 2011 memo](#) in which General Schwartz warned Air Force commanders not to proselytize or show favoritism toward a particular faith. Schwartz issued the memo shortly after the Air Force suspended an ethics course for incoming nuclear missile officers that included Bible references and launched a review of all officer training on ethics and character development.

“Commanders or supervisors who engage in [proselytizing] may cause members to doubt their impartiality and objectivity,” Schwartz wrote. “The potential result is a degradation of the unit’s morale, good order and discipline.”

In the memo Schwartz ordered that commanders refrain from appearing to endorse religious programs such as those provided by the Chaplain Corps. “I expect chaplains, not commanders, to notify Airmen of Chaplain Corps programs,” Schwartz wrote.

According to [Fox News](#), in the case of the missile training program, “the training document in question



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contained the following paragraph: ‘If you attend chapel regularly, both officers and Airmen are likely to follow this example. If you are morally lax in your personal life, a general moral indifference within the command can be expected.’”

A group calling itself the [Military Religious Freedom Foundation](#) complained to the Air Force that such counsel created “the inescapable impression that regular church attendance is a requirement for commissioned Air Force officers in order to demonstrate positive morals to subordinates.”

In the case of the logo, used by the Air Force Rapid Capabilities Office, the original patch read, in Latin: “Opus Dei Cum Pecunia Alienum Efficemus” (“Doing God’s Work with Other People’s Money.”) But when a complaint was filed about that religious reference, the logo was changed to read: “Doing *Miracles* with Other People’s Money.”

And in the case of the changes to the Air Force accommodations checklist, the Air Force removed a question from its checklist that asked if a Bible was provided in rooms where Air Force officers stayed, although no order was given to actually remove the Bibles from the rooms.

In their letter to Panetta the congressmen argued that the changes in policy targeting religious expression appeared to be tied to Schwartz’s memo. Defending the memo, a spokesman for Schwartz’s office explained that “we have seen instances where well-meaning commanders and senior noncommissioned officers appeared to advance a particular religious view among their subordinates, calling into question their impartiality and objectivity. We can learn from these instances.”

The congressmen noted that Schwartz’s memo stated that he expected chaplains, not commanders, to notify airmen of programs provided by chaplains, “suggesting that the mere mention of these programs is impermissible.” Said the lawmakers: “We believe this statement exemplifies the troubling ‘complete separation’ approach that is creating a chilling effect down the chain of command as airmen attempt to comply.”

The congressmen warned that the changes instituted by Schwartz “lend credence to the notion that the Air Force will remove any references to God or faith that an outside organization brings to its attention.”

In response to the congressional letter, the Air Force issued a statement insisting that it is “dedicated to creating an environment in which people can realize their highest potential without any consideration of one’s personal religious or other beliefs.” The statement said that Air Force service members are free to exercise their right to religious expression as long as it is respectful to others, is conducive to order and discipline, and does not detract from the mission of the Air Force.

Correction: In paragraph nine of this article, the author originally identified the Military Religious Freedom Foundation as the group filing the complaint. The complaint was actually filed by another party.



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