



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on July 27, 2011

Houston Nat'l Cemetery Draws Ire for Christian Prayer Ban at Funerals

In what critics say is political correctness run amok, the Houston National Cemetery has banned Christian prayer at the funerals of military veterans. U.S. Rep. John Culberson (R-Texas, left) is now demanding a congressional investigation of the cemetery after he went undercover and discovered the ban is still enforced at funerals there.



On July 8 Culberson attended undercover a burial at the cemetery, where he witnessed members of the honor guard from the Veterans of Foreign Wars being prohibited from making any references to God. Culberson explained,

The Obama administration had told the nation and me they were not interfering with the prayer said over the graves of veterans. And I went undercover to personally verify that claim.

Culberson contends the effort is part of a larger agenda:

The Obama administration continues to try to prevent the word "God" from being used at the funerals of our heroes. It's unacceptable and I'm going to put a stop to it as fast as humanly possible.

According to a written statement to Fox News Radio from Veterans Affairs press secretary Josh Taylor, no such religious speech has been denied:

The idea that invoking the name of God or Jesus is banned at VA national cemeteries is blatantly false. The truth is, VA's policy protects veterans' families' rights to pray however they choose at our national cemeteries.

No one should make judgments before all the facts are known.

Representative Culberson contends, however, that the commander of the honor guard was instructed by cemetery officials to approach a grieving widow to confirm whether she wanted the word "God" mentioned at her husband's service.

The commander of the honor guard, according to Culberson, "quite correctly said as a Texan and a man of honor and integrity, 'I'm not bothering that poor woman at this most terrible time of her life. We're going to do the ritual.'" Culberson reports that he witnessed the entire scene:

Right in front of me, the VA directly and deliberately attempted to prevent the VFW from doing their magnificent, spiritual ritual over the grave of this fallen hero.

The cemetery is already the focus of a lawsuit filed on behalf of the VFW, an American Legion post, and Houston's National Memorial Ladies. Fox News reports:



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They claim the VA banned members of the organizations from using the words “God” or “Jesus” at burial services.

They also allege they were banned from reciting prayers or using religious language during services unless families approved the text in advance.

Likewise, the cemetery first became the subject of controversy after a Memorial Day event at which a pastor was instructed to remove the name of Jesus from his prayer.

Patriot Action Network [reported](#) on the incident:

Attorneys for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs informed a federal judge in Houston today the agency has reconsidered its position on religious-specific prayer at Houston National Cemetery, agreeing a pastor can utter “Jesus Christ” during his Memorial Day prayer.

“(The agency) will let the prayer go on this Monday,” Assistant U.S. Attorney Fred Hindrichs told U.S. District Judge Lynn Hughes.

Hughes slapped down the agency on Thursday, saying it can’t stop a pastor from using the words “Jesus Christ” in his Memorial Day invocation at Houston National Cemetery.

“The government cannot gag citizens when it says it is in the interest of national security, and it cannot do it in some bureaucrat’s notion of cultural homogeneity,” Hughes wrote in his order, granting the Rev. Scott Rainey’s motion for the court to intercede.

As Rep. Culberson is responsible for overseeing the subcommittee responsible for the funding of the cemetery, he asserts that he will see to it that the cemetery director is fired:

The cemetery director [Arleen Ocasio] has to leave. I will zero out her salary. If she attempted to work for the VA anywhere in the state of Texas her salary will be zero. It makes my skin crawl that liberals are attempting to drive prayer out of a funeral ceremony for our heroes. We’re going to fix this so that no Obama liberal bureaucrat will interfere with the funeral of a hero.

Culberson plans to hold hearings on the cemetery in the fall.

Still, VA press secretary Taylor defended the cemetery’s policies, asserting they are in place to protect families who are mourning the loss of loved ones:

Put simply, VA policy puts the wishes of the veteran’s family above all else on the day it matters most — the day they pay their final respects to their loved ones. Out of respect for the families, VA’s policy exists to prevent anyone from disrespecting or interfering with a veteran’s private committal service.

Unmoved, Representative Culberson declared, “They will bury 10 to 20 American heroes today, and the Obama administration is preventing prayers from being said over their gravesites — today.”



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