



White House Announces Strong Opposition to Religious Freedom in Military

The Obama administration has released a statement saying that it “strongly objects” to an amendment in the [National Defense Authorization Act](#) (NDAA) that would protect the religious freedoms of men and women in the armed forces. The amendment (Section 530), offered by U.S. Representative John Fleming (R-La.), would specifically expand the “protection of rights of conscience of members of the Armed Forces and chaplains,” according to language in the amendment.



In its statement of objection the Obama administration noted that the amendment “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.’” The White House complained that by “limiting the discretion of commanders to address potentially problematic speech and actions within their units, this provision would have a significant adverse effect on good order, discipline, morale, and mission accomplishment.”

Fleming insisted that the amendment is necessary to counter the increasing animosity toward religious freedom among military personnel. “The men and women who put their lives on the line to defend our freedoms should not have their own religious freedom jeopardized during their military service,” the congressman said in a statement when he introduced the measure June 5. He emphasized that the amendment would help “ensure that men and women of faith will not be discriminated against in the Armed Forces and will be free to exercise their religious beliefs.”

He noted that some armed forces personnel, “particularly chaplains, feel like their ability to execute their duties is being greatly limited by some of the policies and actions in the Pentagon.” While “steps to protect the religious liberties of our Armed Forces were taken in last year’s NDAA,” Fleming recalled, “troubling reports indicate that the military may be focused only on protecting beliefs of service members, and not the exercise or expression of those beliefs.”

Among the examples of such “troubling reports” over the past year was news that:

- Training material used by the Army Reserve had identified Protestant Christians, Catholics, and Orthodox Jews as “religious extremists” similar to al-Qaeda and Hamas.
- The U.S. Army blocked military personnel from accessing the website of the Southern Baptist Convention, citing unnamed “hostile content” on the site.
- The Defense Department confirmed that military personnel could face disciplinary action — including court-martial — for sharing their faith with others.
- Christian prayers were temporarily banned during funeral services for veterans at Houston’s National Cemetery.



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on June 15, 2013

- Bibles were prohibited for a short time at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.
- Crosses and a steeple were removed from a chapel in Afghanistan after military officials determined they were antagonistic to other religions.

Following the administration's statement of opposition to the measure, Fleming said that it appeared the president is attempting to block religious freedom among the troops. "With its statement, the White House is now endorsing military reprimands of members who keep a Bible on their desk or express a religious belief," he told [Fox News](#). "This Administration is aggressively hostile towards religious beliefs that it deems to be politically incorrect."

Several conservative Christian policy groups responded to the White House statement, with Kellie Fiedorek, litigation counsel for [Alliance Defending Freedom](#), arguing that the response demonstrates that President Obama clearly "opposes constitutional religious freedom for service men and women." Fiedorek called the response the "latest example of this administration's hostility toward religious service members. Antagonism toward people of faith — namely Christians — in the military is real, and it is disappointing that the President is unwilling to support laws that protect and defend the basic liberty of religious freedom."

Similarly, Tony Perkins of the [Family Research Council](#) said President Obama's opposition to the amendment "reveals that this Administration has gone beyond accommodating the anti-Christian activists who want to remove any vestige of Christianity from the military, to aiding them by blocking this bipartisan measure."

Perkins observed that the the Fleming amendment "protects the right of service members to not only hold religious beliefs, but to act on them and freely practice those beliefs as long as they pose no threat to U.S. Constitutional liberties. This chilling suppression of religious freedom is driving faith underground in our military and will eventually drive it out. This not only deprives those who serve of the benefits that flow from religious participation, but it undermines the moral foundation of the world's most powerful military and the country they serve."

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