



Vice President Vows “Bible Stays” at Embattled VA Facility

Vice President Mike Pence (shown) has come to the defense of faith-minded U.S. military veterans, saying in a speech at the American Legion’s national convention in Indianapolis that attempts to sanitize religious observance and symbols from VA facilities will not be tolerated under the Trump administration. Pence specifically referred to a lawsuit, filed by an [“atheist” group](#) supposedly on behalf of a veteran unhappy over the presence of a Bible on display at a veterans’ medical facility in Manchester, Vermont.



A spokesman for the group filing the lawsuit argued that the presence of the Bible in the memorial amounted to “raising one faith over all the others. From our perspective, it’s a repugnant example of fundamentalist Christian triumphalism, exceptionalism, superiority, and domination, and it cannot stand.”

The Manchester Veterans Center initially caved in to the complaint and removed the Bible, but put it back on display following an outpouring of support for the Christian symbol by veterans and military groups across the nation.

Referencing the lawsuit in his August 28 speech, Pence told his audience: “You might’ve heard: there’s a lawsuit to remove a Bible that was carried in World War II from a Missing Man Table at a VA hospital in New Hampshire. It’s really no surprise because, under the last administration, VA hospitals were removing Bibles and even banning Christmas carols in an effort to be politically correct. But let me be clear: Under this administration, VA hospitals will not be religion-free zones.”

Following an enthusiastic round of applause from the American Legion audience, the vice president emphasized that the Trump administration “will always respect the freedom of religion of every veteran of every faith. And my message to the New Hampshire VA hospital is: The Bible stays.”

Pence added that “as we meet the health care needs of our veterans, let me make you another promise: this administration will always make room for the spiritual needs of our heroes at the VA as well.”

An angry spokesperson for the group filing the lawsuit to have the Bible removed from the New Hampshire VA facility replied to Pence’s comments, calling the vice president “one of the most repulsive and repellent fundamentalist Christian supremacists and bullies on the scene today.” The enraged spokesperson added that it was no surprise Pence was “lending his ugly bigotry and pervasive prejudice in support of keeping that Christian bible bolted down on that POW/MIA table at the Manchester, New Hampshire VA Medical Center.”

First Liberty Institute, which is representing the Northeast POW/MIA Network, the group that had originally placed the Bible and “Missing Man” memorial at the Manchester VA facility, said in a statement that such memorials “have a long, cherished history in our nation. Veterans organizations like the Northeast POW/MIA Network should be able to honor and remember those killed, captured, or



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missing with a display that includes a Bible donated by a WWII veteran that represents the strength through faith necessary for American service members to survive.”

In response to efforts in recent years to block First Amendment protected religious expression at VA facilities, in July the Department of Veterans Affairs announced some major policy revisions “permitting religious literature, symbols and displays at VA facilities to protect religious liberty for Veterans and families while ensuring inclusivity and nondiscrimination.”

The VA specified that the updated policy would: allow for “religious content” such as Bibles “in publicly accessible displays at VA facilities,” allow patients and guests at VA facilities “to request and be provided religious literature, symbols and sacred texts,” and allow VA facilities “to accept donations of religious literature, cards and symbols at its facilities and distribute them to VA patrons....”

Commenting on the updated policy, VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said that the goal is “to make sure that all of our veterans and their families feel welcome at VA, no matter their religious beliefs. Protecting religious liberty is a key part of how we accomplish that goal. These important changes will bring simplicity and clarity to our policies governing religious and spiritual symbols, helping ensure we are consistently complying with the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution at thousands of facilities across the department.”



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