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## Congressman, Chaplain Attack Air Force Religion Policy

By JOSH GERSTEIN - Staff Reporter of the Sun  
February 14, 2006

A new Air Force policy on religious tolerance is under fire from a Navy chaplain and a congressman who complain that it will forbid chaplains from praying in the name of Jesus at official gatherings.

"I'm very disappointed that they're still trying to censor the content of our prayers," the Navy chaplain, Lieutenant Gordon Klingenschmitt said.

The Air Force guidelines issued last week do not explicitly ban sectarian prayers at military ceremonies, but a chaplain who is a Jewish rabbi told the Jewish Week newspaper that such prayers would be banned. The rules indicate that it may be appropriate to offer "non-denominational, inclusive prayer, or a moment of silence."

"To me the word non-denominational is a code word for no Jesus," said Lieutenant Klingenschmitt, an Episcopal priest who briefly mounted a hunger strike over the issue at the White House last year. "I have to pray a Muslim, Christian, Jewish prayer at the same time. I don't know how to do that," he said.

Rep. Walter Jones, a Republican of North Carolina, said he is troubled by recent incidents where chaplains have been asked not to mention Jesus in public prayers. "They should be able to pray as their faith and tradition calls upon them," he told The New York Sun.

The congressman said he has urged Defense Secretary Rumsfeld to set a military-

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wide policy allowing chaplains to deliver whatever prayers they see fit. Asked if the Air Force rules should be adopted by the other services, Mr. Jones said, "I would hope not."

Lieut. Klingenschmitt said that if the Navy is subjected to the rules, he will go to court. "I will definitely sue," he said.

Some conservative religious groups, such as the National Association of Evangelicals, have endorsed the new policy, which also states that chaplains cannot be forced to offer prayers "inconsistent with their faiths."

The new guidelines are the product of a review into complaints that evangelical Christians were proselytizing at the Air Force Academy in Colorado. In 2004, a football coach there posted a "Team Jesus" banner in the locker room. It was later ordered removed.

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