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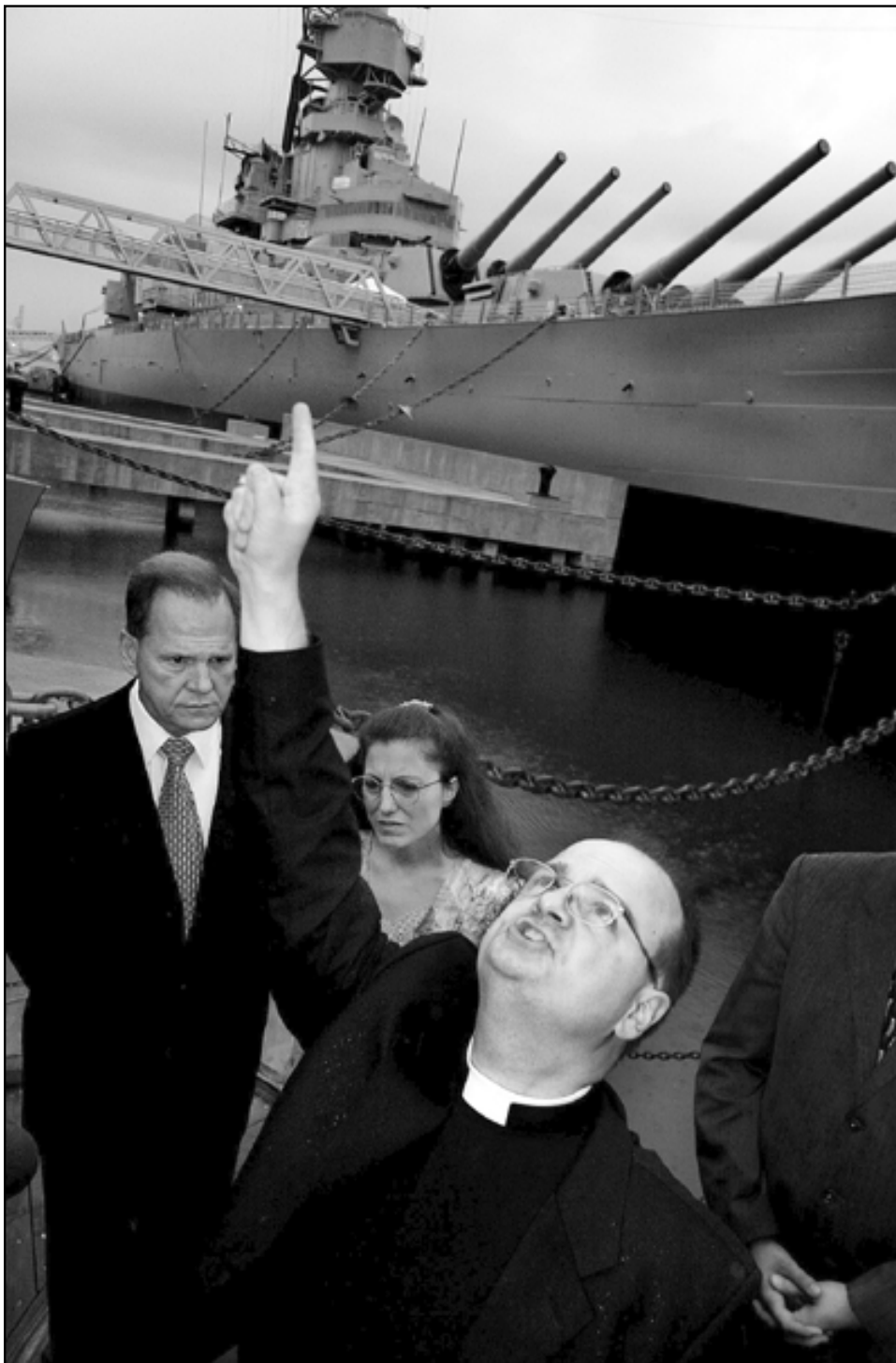
# THE DECATUR DAILY

online edition **News**

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2006

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AP File Photo by Bill Tiernan  
**Navy Chaplain Lt. Gordon J. Klingenschmitt, right, of Virginia Beach, Va., with his wife, Mary, and former Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice Roy Moore.**

# Public prayer in Jesus' name

## In poll, readers say to let military chaplains offer it

**By Steve Stewart**  
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Military chaplains should have the right to lead public prayers in Jesus' name, according to 85 percent of DAILY readers who responded to an online poll.

"Should military chaplains be allowed to lead prayers in Jesus' name during public events that are not religious services?" the poll asked.

The results: 182 readers (85.5 percent) said yes and 31 readers (14.6 percent) said no. The two-day poll concluded Saturday. It was unscientific, and people could vote from any location.

### 'Yes,' with qualifiers

A retired chaplain said he would have to answer yes to the question as posed, but clergy who pray at "non-religious" events should be sensitive to the needs of the people present.

"In my opinion, a chaplain should be allowed to offer public prayers in keeping with the tenets of his/her religious faith, whether Christian or non-Christian," retired U.S. Army Col. Danny W. Burttram of Harvest wrote in an e-mail.

But he drew a line between church gatherings that are open to the public and political, social, civic, sports and other "non-religious" events.

"I would like to see a focus on the importance of offering prayers in public places in a manner that is most meaningful to those in attendance," he wrote. "The object of prayer is not to flaunt one faith against another. The chaplain who flaunts his faith above others in prayer forgets the basic purpose of prayer: to emphasize the presence of God in the midst of specific real-life situations. And God is present to different people in different ways.

"So, the chaplain offers 'public prayer' in a manner that enables those in attendance to perceive God's presence in their lives at the moment, each in his own way. Sometimes this means omitting a phrase such as 'in Jesus' name' — and sometimes it doesn't.

"So the real question is not whether to allow a chaplain (or clergy person) to offer public prayers in Jesus' name. I seriously doubt that there is an authority that can 'disallow' this practice.

"But officials charged with the responsibility of planning ceremonies for 'non-religious' events can exercise judgment as to which clerics should offer prayers at these events. My guidance to them: Seek out those clergy persons who can best focus in their prayers on the different needs of those in attendance; invite them to give the prayer or invocation; don't invite those who can't or won't do this."

## **'No'**

Ron Schooling of Decatur, who voted no, offered this comment:

"Asking such a question in the Bible Belt is analagous to asking a fundamentalist Muslim in Saudi Arabia if it is OK to invoke Allah's name in a prayer at a public event.

"Of course the answer is going to be an overwhelming 'yes.' Fundamentalists, of which we have more than our share in Alabama, are not noted for religious tolerance."

## **'Yes,' no question**

James Shook of Decatur voted yes.

"This is exactly why we should keep religion out of government and, more importantly, government out of religion," Shook wrote. "Government will always feel the need to control and regulate religion."

The case of a chaplain, Lt. Gordon Klingenschmitt, prompted the poll. The Navy disciplined him for disobeying an order by appearing in uniform at a political news conference, where he protested Navy policy requiring nondenominational prayers outside religious services.

Klingenschmitt said he believes he was punished for making a political speech in uniform because he prayed in Jesus' name.

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