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FAITH UNDER FIRE

Congress tackles chaplains' right to pray

Klingenschmitt says senator's proposal would 'add insult to my injury'

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In the wake of a Navy chaplain's punishment related to a public event in which he prayed "in Jesus' name," Congress is debating several versions of a bill to address the religious liberties of military ministers.



Lt. Gordon James Klingenschmitt

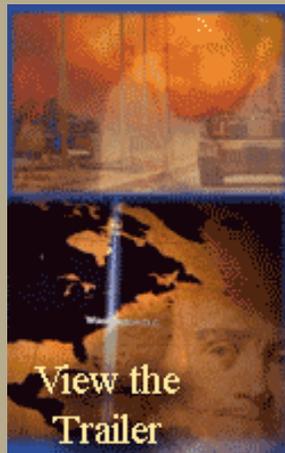
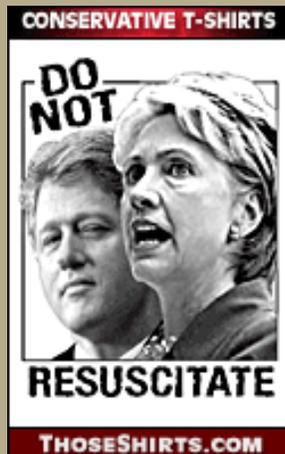
As [WND reported](#), a jury of U.S. Naval officers Thursday recommended a reprimand and a \$250 fine per month for a



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year for Lt. Gordon James Klingenschmitt, a Christian chaplain who was convicted of disobeying an order not to wear his military uniform for media appearances.

Klingenschmitt insists the White House appearance at which he prayed "in Jesus' name" was a bona fide religious event and he had written permission from his commander to wear his uniform at such events.

(Story continues below)

The chaplain continues to press the issue on a public-policy level, consulting with lawmakers on Capitol Hill as they consider language that is part of the Defense Authorization Bill.

The House has passed a version authored by [Rep. Duncan Hunter, R-Calif.](#), that would allow chaplains to pray according to their faith.

The bill is in a conference committee in which the House and Senate are working out differences.

The House bill reads: "Each Chaplain shall have the prerogative to pray according to the dictates of the chaplain's own conscience, except as must be limited by military necessity, with any such limitation being imposed in the least restrictive manner feasible."

In the Senate, [Sen. John Warner, R-Va.](#), is advocating language that has Klingenschmitt concerned.

The proposal reads: "In situations other than theological services or sectarian ceremonies when a prayer is offered, the

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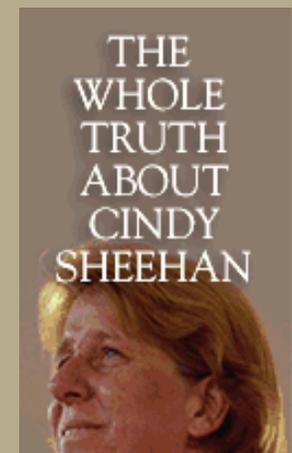
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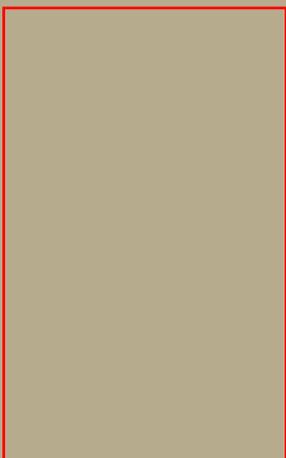
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policy shall require chaplains to be sensitive to and respect the diversity of faiths represented."

The Navy chaplain calls Warner's version worse than hate speech laws, contending it empowers the Pentagon to make bad policies that will censor chaplains' prayers and enforce "pluralism" as a new government religion.

"Pluralism is the opposite of diversity," Klingenschmitt told WND. "Pluralism requires we all pray 'sensitive' prayers to one government-god, but diversity means we can take turns and each pray according to our own diverse beliefs."

Klingenschmitt said the proposal would add "insult to my injury."

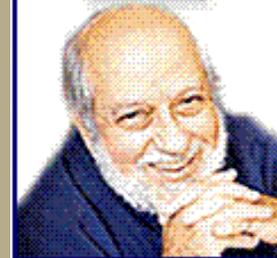
"If Senator Warner imposes theological sensitivity requirements, all chaplains could be punished for the content of their sermons," he said.

Amanda Banks, federal policy analyst for [Focus on the Family Action](#) – a public policy group tied to James Dobson's Focus on the Family – said Warner's proposal would violate the First Amendment rights of chaplains.

"The alternate language seeks to establish a right not to be offended, rather than protecting freedom of speech," she said. "It rejects religious liberty and would likely prevent a chaplain from praying 'in Jesus' name' outside of a church service."

Klingenschmitt favors a proposal by [Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C.](#), to simply add the words "and pray" to the existing statute.

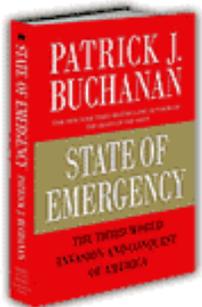
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10 USC 6031 would then read: "An officer in the chaplain corps may conduct public worship and pray according to the manner and forms of the church of which he is a member."

The Navy chaplain said this would return the law to the way it had been until 1860. In the course of his case, Klingenschmitt said, the secretary of the Navy redefined "public worship" as only during "divine services" inside a chapel on Sundays.

Earlier this week President Bush's spokesman, Tony Snow, responded to a WND question about the issue, saying, "The president believes the chaplains ought to be able to be free to express to their religious beliefs, and he further believes in allowing the military to handle its own issues."

Klingenschmitt contends the Navy secretary is "deliberately censoring the content of our prayers."

In his court-martial, he said, a Navy judge enforced that policy by declaring worshipping in public is not the same as public worship.

The judge, refusing Klingenschmitt's motion earlier this month to drop the case, concluded chaplains are protected only inside the chapel on Sunday morning. If ordered not to worship in public, and they disobey, chaplains can be punished at a criminal court martial.

"There is no more fundamental right than the inalienable right to worship our creator, and I pray in Jesus name," Klingenschmitt said. "For any government official to require non-sectarian prayers is for him to enforce his government religion upon me, to censor, exclude and punish me for my



participation"

Several dozen other chaplains also have joined in a civilian lawsuit that alleges the Navy hierarchy allows only those Christian ministers who advocate only non-sectarian blandishments to be promoted. Those with evangelical beliefs, they say, are routinely drummed from the Navy.

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