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New State Police prayer rules prompt 6 to quit chaplain duties

Posted to: News

Poll: What do you think about this rule?

By Julian Walker
The Virginian-Pilot
© September 25, 2008

RICHMOND

Thou shalt not mention specific deities in public prayers.

That command was handed down recently to Virginia State Police troopers who work as chaplains, prompting several to resign the religious part of their jobs because they are forbidden to mention a particular god by name.

Republican legislators blasted the policy Wednesday, marking the latest flare-up in the debate over how much religion is appropriate in government.

Del. Charles W. "Bill" Carrico Sr., R-Grayson, is leading a campaign to have it reversed.

declared the decision an "attack on Christianity" and is leading a campaign to have it reversed. "Censoring what these chaplains can say is a violation of their First Amendment right to freedom of expression," said Carrico, a former state trooper who plans legislation to undo the restriction if it isn't rescinded.

Col. W. Steven Flaherty, the State Police superintendent, earlier this month had instructed his department's 17 chaplains to abide by a recent federal court decision upholding the constitutionality of nonsectarian prayers at government functions. At public functions, officers are permitted to use only nondenominational prayers.

In protest, six of the chaplains resigned those duties.

Flaherty cited the court decision - the case involved a challenge to a Fredericksburg City Council rule requiring nondenominational prayers prior to public meetings - in a written statement about the new policy.

"The department recognizes the importance as a state government agency to be inclusive and respectful of the varied ethnicities, cultures, and beliefs of our employees, their families and citizens at large," Flaherty said in a statement released Wednesday.

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nder tractor-trailer on I-64 near Greenbrier

Trained in ministry, chaplains may provide spiritual guidance and counseling to employees and their families. They also can give invocations and benedictions at department ceremonies.

One of the six chaplains who resigned that post, 13-year trooper Rex Carter, said his faith had compelled him to conduct religion-related duties.

"There were several of us who felt that because of our convictions... about what the Bible says, we couldn't agree to go along with a generic prayer policy," said Carter, who works in Southwest Virginia.

Republicans weren't as judicious in their response.

A written statement issued by the office of House Majority Leader Morgan Griffith, R-Salem, attacked the decision and accused Gov. Timothy M. Kaine's administration of banning "references to Jesus Christ."

Firing back, Kaine spokesman Gordon Hickey said the decision was made exclusively by Flaherty but is supported by the governor.

"Gov. Kaine is a man of faith and has dedicated his life to that service," Hickey said.

University of Richmond law professor Carl Tobias praised Flaherty for responding in a "dispassionate, fair way" to the court ruling. He called the State Police policy "a perfectly appropriate reading" of the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals decision in the Fredericksburg case.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State, an advocacy group, supports the policy, but officials there also wondered whether it goes far enough.

"There's a fair amount of case law that says you can't include prayer at public events," said Ayesha Khan, the group's legal director. "But certainly if you do include them, they should be nondenominational."

Chris Freund of The Family Foundation expressed "tremendous concern" about "a person of faith being silenced in any way."

Freund, a vice president with the Richmond-based conservative advocacy group, said legal action seeking to overturn the policy is possible.

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[NO HABLES ESPANOL](#)

Submitted by [Ira Tateu](#) on Mon, 10/06/2008 at 9:15 pm.

Mary, I think what is being said by A. Einstein is not really an attack on religion, although it may create conflict for a few. This person is simply pointing out that morality is not dictated by religion but a collection of experiences and how a person chooses to expel this energy. To act in a proper manner is subjective. Religion in the sense of thought is nothing more than a guide book to a particular direction. The desire to do good or bad had no discernable heir. Those who search for Jesus may find him, but for others it is not needed. I personally have difficulties w/ the bible but do believe in God. I have taken my "leap of faith." Do I believe God is my motivation to behave well? No, it is me.

Thanks for the minute Mary.

[THEIR MOUTHS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN THEIR MINISTRIES](#)

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Submitted by [iluvatar](#) on Sat, 09/27/2008 at 9:35 pm.

Chaplains have resigned, abandoning their ministry to "individual employees and their families in their time of need" —WHAT KIND OF CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY IS THAT?

The chaplains were not forbade to utter the name JESUS:

"Department chaplains to offer non-denominational prayers at Department-sanctioned, public events...The Superintendent's request does not affect chaplains offering their services at private ceremonies (i.e. funerals) or when counseling individual employees and their families in their time of need."

NOT JUST ALLAH AS AN ALTERNATE DIETY

Submitted by [noon](#) on Fri, 09/26/2008 at 4:09 pm.

but the Goddess as well, perhaps the flying spaghetti monster if some "zealot" wants to push it, perhaps Vishnu, the elephant headed god -- though Hindi tend to be pretty undemonstrative. Also, I found a corn chip that reminds of of my late aunt Rose, such a saint that women was. I'm thinking about writing a book about her sayings and deeds--perhaps a couple of her recipes too! So I'm going to get myself and the corn chip ordained and then, being a law abiding and Rose-fearing tax payer, head on over to police HQ and say a little prayer over some of the mounties -- we're all OK with this right? Didn't think so.

That said I'm actually fine with chaplains invoking the name of their diety. But at some point, to someone outside of that chaplain's faith, repeated invitations for you to join the group, bow your head and pray to o' Rose starts looking like harassment. Are you all ready to kneel before the elep

MARY

Submitted by [clewis](#) on Fri, 09/26/2008 at 2:58 pm.

How is directing a poster to another blog "staying on topic"?. I thought the article was about the Chaplains... Anyway, as someone that does believe in God, I find it difficult to censor prayer that invokes his name, however, I can relate to another poster regarding the Muslim faith and how I would feel if Allah was being mentioned in prayer by a gov't official, therefore, I do believe the right decision was made and I respect the Chaplains for resigning.

NOON

Submitted by [marym63204](#) on Fri, 09/26/2008 at 1:05 pm.

Direct away, Noon (smile)--it's not rude, it's the Pilot's policy that we should stay on topic on these boards. My comments were about not being able to pray in any other way than Jesus' name and why, when I was acting as a chaplain at military functions, so they were related. But I see your point that some others did wander a bit. Cheers, MGM

MARY MARY

Submitted by [noon](#) on Fri, 09/26/2008 at 12:54 pm.

Einstein was responding to someone below who said something like they would not want non-christian cops because they could not have morals. So, his comment seemed fair. I also have noted some preaching and testifying going on below, but that seems to have escaped your notice. Perhaps I should direct you and other God botherers to a Christian blog? No, that would be rude. Cheers!

ALFRED EINSTEIN

Submitted by [marym63204](#) on Fri, 09/26/2008 at 12:16 pm.

I'm sorry, but I don't see the connection between your post and chaplains.

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It was kind of a canned attack on religion. You, of course, have a right to believe that but isn't there a more appropriate venue, like an atheist-oriented blog? Cheers, MGM

[SEPT 25, 1789: ANNIVERSARY OF THE 1ST AMENDMENT](#)

Submitted by [fergus](#) on Thu, 09/25/2008 at 9:53 pm.

It is very fitting that the Pilot should publish this article on the anniversary of the 1st Amendment, Sept 25, 1789:
Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Thus began the first Ten Amendments, or Bill of Rights, which were approved SEPTEMBER 25, 1789. George Mason, known as "The Father of the Bill of Rights," wrote the Virginia Declaration of Rights from which Jefferson drew to write the Declaration of Independence. George Mason was one of 55 founders who wrote the U.S. Constitution, but was also one of sixteen who refused to sign it because it did not abolish slavery and did not limit the power of the Federal Government. Mason joined with Patrick Henry and Samuel Adams to prevent the Constitution from being ratified, as the abuses of King George's concentrated power were still fresh. It was largely through George

[THERE'S A BIG DIFFERENCE.....](#)

Submitted by [rrc1943](#) on Thu, 09/25/2008 at 7:54 pm.

between an individuals hired as chaplains and "Virginia State Police troopers who work as chaplains." (Read the story)

The primary duty of the people who quite was to be a Virginia State Trooper. The chaplain duties were strictly collateral, it was not the job for which they were hired.

All those who are objecting to the policy should ask themselves this question. How would you feel if one of those state troopers was a Muslim who invoked the name of Allah in his prayers? Would you still be so adamant?

[ONE DOES NOT NEED RELIGION](#)

Submitted by [Alfred Einstein](#) on Thu, 09/25/2008 at 7:11 pm.

One does not need religion to have morals. Without some sort of innate morality, a species, namely man, would not have survived and flourished as we have. Man existed long before the story of Jesus.

If you believe you need religion to get your morals and can't determine right from wrong using your own intelligence, you truly are a non thinker.

Maybe that's why Sunday head noddors are called "followers".

[WAIT A MINUTE...](#)

Submitted by [rlesley74](#) on Thu, 09/25/2008 at 6:11 pm.

How about everyone reach inside their pocket or wallet, pull out any legal tender you have in there and look on the back, whats it say there? "In God we trust"

'Nuff said

[WELL, MARY I BELIEVE YOU ARE MONEY](#)

Submitted by [Len Rothman](#) on Thu, 09/25/2008 at 4:40 pm.

We may have free speech, but it does cost. Come to think of it, we may be free to worship as we see fit, but there is often a collection plate.

LEN

Submitted by [marym63204](#) on Thu, 09/25/2008 at 4:06 pm.

The Pilot obviously knew they would please their advertisers by having this heavy traffic topic today . Cheers, MGM

HMMMM

Submitted by [JustRanting](#) on Thu, 09/25/2008 at 3:39 pm.

I wonder what all these that attempt the separation of church and state have to say about our supply the Quaran, prayer rugs, the direction of Mecca and the call to prayer for those we hold captive. Not only that, but we provide religious leaders for them.

Well you can convince them to pray generic prayers, I'll support you. Until then, no way

WHEW, BRING UP RELIGION AND COMMENT FLY

Submitted by [Len Rothman](#) on Thu, 09/25/2008 at 3:34 pm.

An observant person would see that there are 2 kinds of people in the world: those who believe in deities, and those who don't. If one outnumbers the other, then that minority gets persecuted, or at least gains second class citizenship. If you don't believe as everyone else does, you will suffer some sort of consequence. In this country, you can count on very few atheists gaining political office, for example. But it may not be enough to believe, it is important how you believe. If you believe in God, but not Jesus, then you are at best not eligible for salvation, at worst, subject to indignities and stereotyping. I would like to think that God does not really care who you pray with, if anyone, or if your robe is white, black or gold, whether your baptism is immersion, or a dab, whether you hold snakes or speak in tongues, so long as you practice peace, charity and the golden awareness of treating oth

IT WILL ALL WORK OUT . . .

Submitted by [marym63204](#) on Thu, 09/25/2008 at 2:11 pm.

Because people like me who have stood in as chaplains at Navy changes-of-command stop doing it under the "non-sectarian" rules. Why? Because I don't possess, in myself, the worthiness to come before a holy God unless I come clothed in the name, reputation, and being of His Son Jesus Christ, who merited salvation for us all. As soon as I could no longer pray in that way in public, I could no longer pray in public at all anymore. I have refused to do it since then and so will all who pray in that name and know why they do so. Soon there will be no more prayers to argue about, as I am sure not many will be okay with subbing in Muslim and Buddhist prayers either. Just remember, when you want comfort in time of dying, you're not going to long find a chaplain to provide it. You're gutting the core of their faith with these compromises. Cheers, MGM

JUST GREAT!

Submitted by [ldysknzfn](#) on Thu, 09/25/2008 at 2:07 pm.

Now they're taking Jesus out of prayer...This State is in bad enough shape as it is...taking Jesus out of the equation is going to make things worse..not better. In Jesus name..amen!

COURT RULING IS RIDICULOUS AND UNENFORCEABLE

Submitted by [Bill in VB](#) on Thu, 09/25/2008 at 2:01 pm.

These chaplains should not quit. Let's recognize that the court IS agreeing that prayer by chaplains IS constitutional. That's the bedrock principle here. Then it's only an issue of linguistic footwork that the judge ruled on. But that presents a ludicrous proposition. The word "God", for example, when invoked by a Christian chaplain would be heard by the audience as God Almighty (Father, Son, &

Holy Spirit). Any Muslim in the audience would hardly think he is referring to Allah nor would a Jew consider it a reference to Yahweh. The same would hold true for any Buddhist, Hindu, or other in the listening audience. In any event, if ANY chaplain were to use a term such as "Our Lord" or "Allah" or quotes from Torah, Bible, or Koran, what can they do? Arrest him? Let's take that case to court!!!

[WHAT IS SO HARD TO UNDERSTAND, INDEED???????](#)

Submitted by [lastparker](#) on Thu, 09/25/2008 at 1:34 pm.

These are not just any "government officials" invoking the name of God in an official capacity... they are CHAPLAINS! God IS their official capacity.

When are the Liberals, fierce protectors of freedom of speech, going to stop their constant censorship?

Next up: ban chaplains entirely, lest one accidentally pray by the side of a dying atheist. Maybe atheists should wear alert bracelets, like people allergic to bee stings, to avoid any confusion.

[READ ALL OF WHAT JEFFERSON SAID](#)

Submitted by [michaelc23657](#) on Thu, 09/25/2008 at 1:33 pm.

All of you who are quoting Thomas Jefferson should read ALL of what he said, not just the part that you think supports your argument against prayer. First of all, he never said that there should be no religious activity in the government. He said only that the state should not establish a religion, and in the same sentence, he said there should no restriction on the "free expression thereof." That means that we can pray wherever we wish, whenever we wish, to whatever deity we wish, whether we are government officials or not. The only thing we cannot do is force someone to join a state sponsored religion - period. Everything else has been read into his words.

[MORE CRIME FIGHTERS / LESS PREACHING](#)

Submitted by [Average Joe](#) on Thu, 09/25/2008 at 1:12 pm.

After looking up just what a Chaplain does all day I feel my tax dollars would be better spent on another officer in the streets fighting the gangs that terrorize our neighborhoods.

It is the duty and responsibility of the Police Chaplain to assist with the following duties when possible:

1. The Chaplain assists Departmental officials in notification to families of Departmental members in the event of serious injury or death.
 2. Visits sick and injured police personnel at home or in the hospital; attends, and if possible, participates in funerals of active, as well as retired members, of the Department.
 3. Is on call and requested to be on the street during any major demonstration in the City or any public function requiring the presence of a large number of Police Officers.
 4. Responds to all major disasters upon request by the Chief of Police or designate.
 5. Conducts memorial se
-

[FORBIDDING PUBLIC PRAYER IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST](#)

Submitted by [fdm505](#) on Thu, 09/25/2008 at 12:47 pm.

In the past, I served as the Chaplain for the Republican Party of Virginia Beach for over one year (June 2006 to July 2007). During that time, I typically attended 4 or 5 Republican meetings a month and was often asked to lead a public prayer at those Republican meetings. I almost always would publicly pray in the name of Jesus.

Prayers in the name of Jesus offend some intolerant people. The Chairman of the Republican Party of Virginia Beach at that time, Chuck Smith, repeatedly requested that I cease publicly praying in the name of Jesus. He informed that at least one incumbent Republican delegate was complaining about my Christian public prayers. I firmly but politely refused to cease praying publicly in the name of

Jesus. I am not ashamed to be identified with Christ. During early July 2007, Republican Chairman Chuck Smith, informed me that their chaplain position had been eliminated.

La

[NOPE](#)

Submitted by [ILikeSnacks](#) on Thu, 09/25/2008 at 12:38 pm.

There is a difference between a private citizen praying or invoking the name of God and a government official praying or invoking the name of God when they are acting in an official capacity.

No, there isn't. Especially in the case of chaplain specifically hired to do that. The constitution only restricts laws being passed that restrict religious expression. That's all. Nothing else. No fascist censorship included.

[STANDING BY YOUR CONVICTONS](#)

Submitted by [Chocolatelab1](#) on Thu, 09/25/2008 at 12:22 pm.

Praise the Lord that these individuals had the guts to stand by their beliefs. They shall be rewarded!

[ALL MUST GO](#)

Submitted by [Caspas](#) on Thu, 09/25/2008 at 12:08 pm.

"Do away with the lot of the god gabbers", and the Pagans and other devil worshippers as well. Get rid of the lot of them.

[CONSTITUTION BELIEVE](#)

Submitted by [timh54743](#) on Thu, 09/25/2008 at 11:13 am.

Constitution of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA states that Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. END OF STORY.

[AGREE WITH NPDPPIG.....](#)

Submitted by [Kevin R](#) on Thu, 09/25/2008 at 10:59 am.

If you have never served in the military or in a public safety capacity, then you do not understand how important these chaplains are to the people that serve our country and communities.

[WHO WANTS TO OPPRESS WHOM?](#)

Submitted by [dharma41](#) on Thu, 09/25/2008 at 10:55 am.

Even though it would violate the Constitution, I'm sure there are some people out there who would be in favor of an official state religion, so long as it was their religion. But this is a pluralistic society and our country was founded, in part, on the principle of separation of church and state. To flee the oppressive theocracies of the Old World is why so many came to America in the first place. Just because one faith has more adherents than another in this country does not mean it gets to force itself on the rest of us. This is especially true within official government organizations. As stated in the article, "the restriction applies only to sanctioned government events, not private functions at which a chaplain is asked to preside." For those who decry the prayer rule as being oppressive and a violation of the first amendment, ask yourself this: What if one of these chaplains was a Muslim, a

[CHURCH AND STATE](#)

Submitted by [lawrenceb82104](#) on Thu, 09/25/2008 at 9:51 am.

The Constitution protects us from governmental interference in the worship of our religions. It was not meant to limit our worship. That's where separation of church and state ends. It is not meant to tell the government what religion they favor nor is it meant for the government to prevent one from worshipping his God. After all our entire country was founded in the name of the Christian God. I doubt that there was a single Muslim or Buddhist at Plymouth Rock or Jamestown. The separation of church and state was to prevent a repeat of what the settlers of America fled England to escape. The English government demanding that the Church of England be the only acceptable religion.

TO ALL THE ATHEIST

Submitted by [Joe_Cool](#) on Thu, 09/25/2008 at 9:44 am.

I am so sick of you imposing your belief in nothing on the rest of us! Can I consider you a form of religious expression? Unlike you I go the other way if I don't like what I see or hear.

Let's see a muslim raise a stink that they must pray to Allah and watch the backpeddling and butt kissing that will go along to "accommodate" that person and that religion.

If someone is asking for a chaplain and knows that the person is a Christian, etc, then I would expect you expect a prayer in that person's religious beliefs.

We are a nation of whimps! We can't offend anyone and have to be sensitive to everyone's "feelings". What's next, a rapist comes into your home and violates your family and you are supposed to look at the situation from his point of view?

Political Correctness has gone too far!

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