



*Nurture the Living
Care for the Wounded
Honor the Fallen*

THE FORUM ON THE MILITARY CHAPLAINCY
P.O.Box 151655
Austin, TX 78715-1655

September 15, 2014

Rep. Joe Wilson
Chairman
Subcommittee on Military Personnel
Committee on Armed Services
2120 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

Rep. Susan Davis
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Military Personnel
Committee on Armed Services
2120 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Wilson and Davis:

The Forum on the Military Chaplaincy (Forum) thanks the subcommittee for allowing us to submit statements for entry into the Congressional record.

One of the most significant issues facing the country today is the question of religious liberty provided to all citizens under the First Amendment to our Constitution. Those who are honored to wear our country's uniform are sworn to protect and defend our Constitution. They too have the right to religious liberty. For many, the support of Military chaplains is essential to their free exercise of this important liberty.

In the recent past, due to changes in regulations, particularly the repeal of the law commonly know as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell", and the finding by the United States Supreme Court that parts of the Defense of Marriage Act are unconstitutional, the military chaplaincy has been in some turmoil.

Incorporated by reference into the correspondence, we refer to the attached article "Evangelical Chaplains Respond to Dr. Albert Mohler". This piece was in response to one written by Dr. Mohler, President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, which appeared in the Associated Baptist Press. Two retired evangelical military chaplains, both members of the Forum, authored this response. It addresses the conflict

Advocate for a Military Chaplaincy committed to free and diverse religious expression, and to the sacred traditions of personal integrity, selfless compassion, respect for others, and excellence in leadership.

that has arisen between the instructions given by certain endorsers to their chaplains and the duty of chaplains to “perform or provide” for ALL service members.

We anticipate this apparent conflict will become more problematic. As the services continue to provide chaplains to conduct family support undertakings such as the Army’s Strong Bond Program, the participation of legally married gay and lesbian couples will likely bring this conflict into sharp focus.

Another area the Forum is concerned about is the make up of the military chaplain corps of all the services. The military chaplaincy now includes not only Christians and Jews, but also Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims. This is the way it should be in our pluralistic country. Certainly, the military should mirror the society it is sworn to defend. Recently, this more expansive view of religious liberty and the need for a diverse chaplaincy was handed a significant setback. Attached and included for the record by reference is a letter of support for the appointment of a humanist chaplain written last year by the Forum to the Secretary of Defense. Just last month we were disappointed to hear that the Navy had rejected the highly qualified candidate, Mr. Jason Heap. No reason was given but we fear it was because he is a humanist.

It is undeniable that the religious demographics of our society are changing with an increase in minority religions, as well as significant numbers of humanists, agnostics and atheists. In order to remain relevant, the military chaplaincy should recognize and embrace this change. This would include appointment of chaplains that service members will be able to identify with, and feel comfortable approaching for the support they are entitled to under the law.

Very truly yours,

Paul W. Dodd, Chaplain (Colonel), U.S. Army (Ret)
Co-Chair, Forum on the Military Chaplaincy
E-mail: doddpw@aol.com
Cell: (512) 731-7716

Thomas T. Carpenter, Esq. (CAPT USMC 1970-1982)
Co-Chair, Forum on the Military Chaplaincy
E-mail: tomcarpenter@roadrunner.com
Cell: (310) 562-7416