

Thursday Afternoon, October 1, 2020



MILITARY RELIGIOUS FREEDOM
foundation

MRFF ROUNDLY REBUTS FIRST LIBERTY INSTITUTE STARS AND STRIPES OP-ED ON DISASTROUS NEW DOD RELIGION REGS

Fundamentalist Christian First Liberty Institute's Mike Berry applauds Trump appointee's changing of the Defense Department's religion regs to allow all manner of hitherto prohibited religious proselytizing; MRFF Senior Research Director Chris Rodda rebuts Berry and tells the truth about these disastrous new Christian supremacist regulations.



CHRIS RODDA
MRFF SENIOR
RESEARCH DIRECTOR

MRFF OP-ED ON STARS AND STRIPES

See below this article for First Liberty Institute op-ed rebutted here.

DOD rules take religious freedom to extremes

By: MRFF Senior Research Director Chris Rodda

Thursday, October 1, 2020

(Excerpts from Stars and Stripes/Emphasis Added by MRFF)

Mike Berry's Sept. 24 op-ed "Religious freedom bolstered for all troops" would more aptly be titled "Trump's DOD changes religion regs to appease far-right fundamentalist Christian base and allow all manner of shoving unwanted religion down service members' throats." Berry, of the fundamentalist Christian legal organization First Liberty Institute, crediting "our commander in chief's strong stance on religious freedom," is ecstatic over the changes, and the prospect of completely obliterating the wall of separation between church and state in our military.

The recent action of Trump appointee Matthew P. Donovan, undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness, in transforming DOD Instruction 1300.17 ... makes the allowing of all manner of otherwise prohibited religious behavior the rule rather than the exception.

[...]

In Donovan's new regulation, however, a "religious practice" has been redefined as:

"An action, behavior, or course of conduct constituting individual expressions of religious beliefs, whether or not compelled by, or central to, the religion concerned."

And the definition by which a "governmental act is a substantial burden to a Service member's exercise of religion" now includes anything that:

"Prevents participation in conduct motivated by a sincerely held religious belief"

Behavior and conduct? This could include just about anything. Is God motivating you to proselytize your fellow service members? **Go ahead!** That's "conduct motivated by a sincerely held religious belief." Want to pray out loud at your desk so your subordinates all hear how religious you are? **No problem!** That's just behavior "constituting individual expressions" of your religious beliefs!

[...]

Click to read Article

FIRST LIBERTY INSTITUTE ON STARS AND STRIPES

First Liberty Institute op-ed rebutted in above article.

Religious freedom bolstered for all troops

By: First Liberty Institute's Mike Berry

Wednesday, September 23, 2020

(Excerpts from Stars and Stripes/Emphasis Added by MRFF)

In January 2014, the Department of Defense revised DOD Instruction 1300.17, the regulation that governs the accommodation of religious practices within the military. Shortly thereafter, I was invited on behalf of First Liberty Institute to testify before the U.S. House Armed Services Committee about the threats to religious freedom in the military. During the hearing, I stated that the January 2014 revision was a positive, but incomplete, action. I explained that if our service members were to enjoy the Constitution's full promise of religious freedom, the DOD instruction would need a substantial overhaul.

On Sept. 1, 2020, after more than six years of persistent efforts by First Liberty and others, the DOD delivered in spades. And the revision comes not a moment too soon.

[...]

Recent events during the COVID-19 pandemic have only exacerbated the problem. At bases from Fort Drum, N.Y., to Camp Humphreys, South Korea, our military chaplains remained at their posts, finding innovative ways to continue to serve the troops. Often, the chaplains turned to social media and the internet to find ways to stay connected to the troops in order to offer messages of hope and encouragement during difficult times. Nevertheless, activists and agitators, such as the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, demanded that such messages be censored. Shockingly, the military frequently complied, revealing that far too often military leaders' knee-jerk reaction to any complaint, no matter how petty, is to curtail and censor the religious freedom of those serving in uniform.

But thanks to our commander in chief's strong stance on religious freedom, the DOD is once again in step with the Constitution and federal law. The revised DOD Instruction is a major paradigm shift that offers new hope for religious liberty in the military.

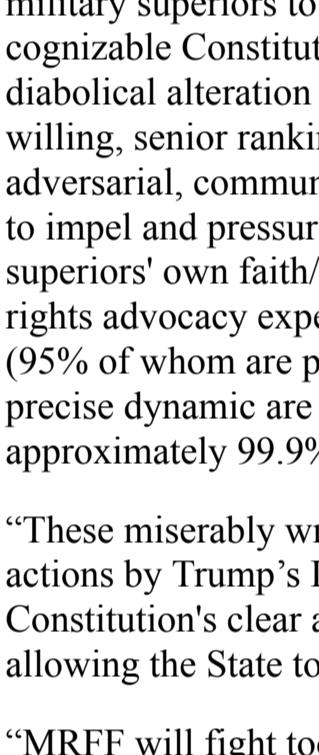
For America's brave service members, for whom faith is an essential element of their life and duty, the new guidance is most welcome. The revised DOD instruction makes clear that religious freedom is a top priority. It now reflects the principles set forth in President Donald Trump's Executive Order 13798, "Promoting Free Speech and Religious Liberty." And importantly, it clearly and unequivocally applies the Religious Freedom Restoration Act to the military.

[...]

Click to read Article

MRFF Founder and President Mikey Weinstein's Statement on Under Secretary Donovan's Outrageous Changes to DoD Religion Regs

Friday, September 18, 2020



"The deliberate and all-encompassing incorporation and prominence of the 'Religious Freedom Restoration Act' in DoD Instruction 1300.17 is extremely concerning to MRFF. In recent years, this 1993 Act has become the go-to law for fundamentalist Christian legal organizations in their ignoble and wholly reprehensible defense of completely unconstitutional promotions of uber-conservative Christianity in the United States armed forces.

"This law is the sick epitome of the right-wing Christians' tortured view of the First Amendment's religion clauses as creating only a one-way wall — in other words, that that the 'Free Exercise' clause of the First Amendment is THE only religion clause that matters, and that the other direction of the wall, the 'No Establishment' clause, simply doesn't even exist.

"Such a preposterous position is utterly bereft of any semblance of Constitutional legality and allowance.

"Additionally, this new version of DoD Instruction 1300.17 has yet ANOTHER Constitutionally abhorrent ticking time bomb. The critical term 'religious practice' has now been almost infinitely expanded to include 'An action, behavior, or course of conduct constituting individual expressions of religious beliefs, whether or not compelled by, or central to, the religion concerned.'

"This shocking, sudden definitional expansion, specifically the 'whether or not compelled by, or central to, the religion concerned' may well now allow military superiors to proselytize their lower-ranking troops without ANY cognizable Constitutional constraints as to time, place and manner. Such a diabolical alteration is clearly designed to serve as a force multiplier for willing, senior ranking military personnel to utilize the hyper tribal, adversarial, communal and ritualistic environment of the U.S. armed forces to impel and pressure their subordinates to convert to and accept their superiors' own faith/worldview concepts. And, in MRFF's considerable civil rights advocacy experience, gleaned from our over 70,000 MRFF client cases (95% of whom are practicing Christians themselves), the oppressors in this precise dynamic are fundamentalist/dominionist Christian military superiors approximately 99.9% of the time.

"These miserably wretched, instantaneous DoD Instruction 1300.17 mauling actions by Trump's DoD cannot be allowed to tar and feather the Constitution's clear and incontrovertible, foundational prohibition of allowing the State to 'establish' religion!

"MRFF will fight tooth and nail, day and night to stop this new, twisted and perverted version of DoD Instruction 1300.17. Indeed, MRFF will never allow this brand new regulatory provision to illicitly buttress the already repugnant and omnipresent efforts of the fundamentalist Christian religious right from perpetuating its pervasive and pernicious pattern and practice of forcing its weaponized version of the Gospel of Jesus Christ upon otherwise defenseless military subordinates."

Previous Coverage of Under Secretary Donovan's Changes to DoD Instruction 1300.17

9/18/20 – MRFF Appalled by Defense Department Under Secretary Rewriting Religion Regulations to Appease Fundamentalist Republican Lawmakers

Highlights of MRFF'S Ongoing and Recent Battles with First Liberty Institute

ONGOING: MRFF battling First Liberty Institute in Manchester, NH VA Medical Center POW/MIA table Bible case — Click to read MRFF's 2018 Washington Examiner Op-Ed dismantling First Liberty's Washington Examiner Op-Ed on POW/MIA tables.

ONGOING: First Liberty Institute fighting for Christian jewelry company's "right" to violate military trademark and licensing regulations after Army and Marine Corps heed MRFF's demand to disallow official military emblems on Bible verse dog tags — Click to read MRFF op-ed on Military Times exposing First Liberty's deception about these Bible verse dog tags.

2017: MRFF's position in Monifa Sterling case, in which MRFF filed "friend of the court" brief, supported by U.S. Supreme Court. First Liberty Institute, which represented Sterling, lost.

2015: MRFF Founder and President Mikey Weinstein nominated by First Liberty Institute for its "Scrooge Award" — Mikey won in 2014

THE NEW HAMPSHIRE UNION LEADER COVERS MRFF

Activist wants sacred Hindu text in Manchester VA lobby

By: Mark Hayward

Tuesday, September 29, 2020

(Excerpts from the New Hampshire Union Leader/Emphasis Added by MRFF)

A Hindu activist said he has waited more than a year for officials at the Manchester VA Medical Center to place a copy of the sacred Hindu text — the Bhagavad Gita — in the entrance lobby of the main building.

Rajan Zed, president of the Reno, Nev.-based Universal Society of Hinduism, seeks to add the work to a missing man POW-MIA table where the VA has displayed a Judeo-Christian Bible for nearly two years.

The placement of the Bible is the subject of an ongoing lawsuit pitting the federal government against an organization that opposes displays of religion in military contexts.

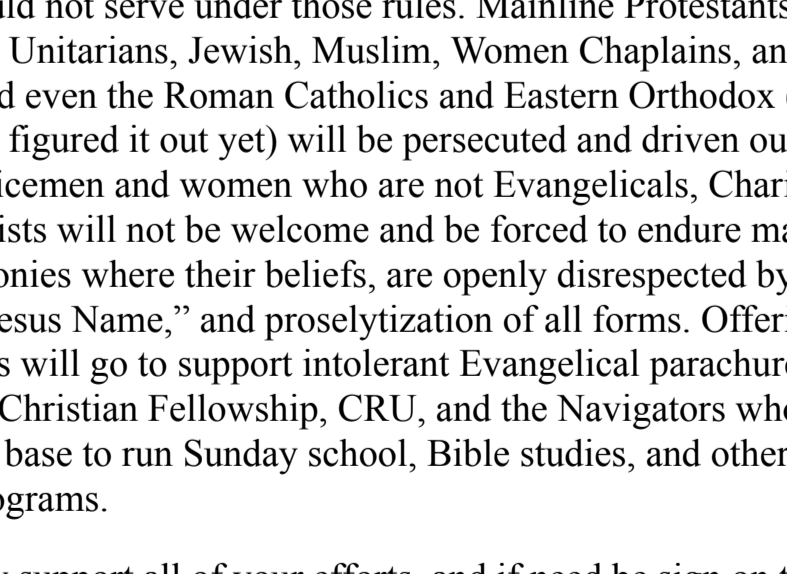
[...]

In May 2019, a veteran backed by the Military Religious Freedom Foundation sued over the presence of the Bible. They said the Bible represents an unconstitutional entanglement of religion and government.

[...]

Click to read Article

Click for background on Manchester, NH VA Medical Center POW/MIA table Bible lawsuit.



"Re: MRFF Appalled by Defense Dept. Under Secretary Rewriting Religion Regs to Appease Fundamentalist Lawmakers"

Mikey,

I read Chris's article in the Daily Kos yesterday and then read the actual instruction/order. It grinds the Establishment Clause to dust and by doing that it will pave the way to have the Chaplain Corps declared unconstitutional. That would be tragic but it is better than a Fundamentalist State Church that does not represent the vast diversity of the military. I am glad that I am retiring, I could not serve under those rules. Mainline Protestants, Progressives, Unitarians, Jewish, Muslim, Women Chaplains, and LGBTQ chaplains, and even the Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox (though the latter haven't figured it out yet) will be persecuted and driven out of the service. Servicemen and women who are not Evangelicals, Charismatics, Or Fundamentalists will not be welcome and be forced to endure mandatory "all hand" ceremonies where their beliefs, are openly disrespected by Chaplains Praying "in Jesus Name," and proselytization of all forms. Offerings made by congregations will go to support intolerant Evangelical parachurch Groups like Officers Christian Fellowship, CRU, and the Navigators who will be allowed onto base to run Sunday school, Bible studies, and other Christian education programs.

I will actively support all of your efforts, and if need be sign on to any lawsuits against this unconstitutional and prejudicial order that destroys the establishment clause and give the Fundamentalists free reign to do whatever they want. I will write my congressional Representatives, and Senators. I will ask my Endorser and other that I know to oppose it, and if need be sign on to any lawsuit against DOD to kill it even if it means killing the Chaplain Corps in the process.

I will write for you, and I will fight at your side.

We have to fight and win. If they win we all lose. Thank you for your support and friendship.

Shalom Shabbat, L'shanah tovah,

(Current Senior active duty Chaplain, name, service, and duty station withheld)

Click to Read in Inbox



MRFF Information/Contact:
(505) 250-7727

SUPPORT MRFF!

Your Generous Support Allows us to Continue our
Fight in the Courts and in the Media

[Make a Donation](#)

[Join MRFF's Constitution Society \(Recurring Donation\)](#)

[Help Build the Wall: Donate a "Brick"!](#)

