

## **SPECIAL ORDER REMARKS RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN THE MILITARY**

Thursday, November 14

Mr. Speaker, I rise today again in support of Religious freedom in our military. I am honored to represent thousands of men and women in uniform who serve at the five military installations in my district. Our military is made up of brave, peace-loving men and women of all faiths, who deserve to practice their respective religion free from harassment and malicious attacks.

But, there is a growing and troubling pattern of religious discrimination against our men and women in arms. Earlier this year, an Army Reserve training brief listed Catholics, Evangelical Christians, Sunni Muslims and some Jews as “religious extremists”, along with groups like Al Qaeda, Hamas and the KKK. In response to this troubling report, I sent a letter, along with 34 of my colleagues, to the Secretary of the Army to express deep concern and to request information about what is being done to prevent this sort of offensive briefing from being given again.

In his response, Secretary John McHugh assured us that this briefing was an isolated incident. Secretary McHugh also made note of a corrective

measure that would require all briefings of this nature to be vetted with the appropriate unit leaders and subject matter experts prior to presentation.

Sadly, this past month, reports of additional offensive Army briefings came to light. First at Camp Shelby in Mississippi, where an Army Reserve Training Briefing listed the American Family Association, a respected Christian organization, as a domestic hate group alongside groups like the Ku Klux Klan, Neo-Nazis, the Black Panthers and the Nation of Islam. And also at a Fort Hood briefing that listed Christian Evangelical groups as a “threat” to the United States. These disturbing reports have made clear that the offensive briefing given in April was not an isolated incident, and one that must be addressed.

I was encouraged to learn that Secretary McHugh, who after learning of the most recent incidents issued an order to cease all briefings on the subject of extremist organizations or activities.” Secretary McHugh rightly described the mislabeling of Christian evangelical groups as quote- inaccurate, objectionable, and otherwise inconsistent with current Army policy.-unquote.

I commend Secretary McHugh’s recent action and believe it was a step in the right direction. However, these Army briefings are small examples of

what I believe is a larger issue, which is a growing culture of intolerance toward people of faith in the military. In addition to briefings mislabeling Christians, we have also seen a Christian chaplain ordered to remove a religious column he had written which simply detailed the history of the phrase “there are no atheists in foxholes.” Active efforts are under way to remove the phrase “so help me God” from the Air Force Academy oath. The President, upon signing the National Defense Authorization Act, called religious freedom protections for military chaplains and other service members “unnecessary and ill-advised.”

Mr. Speaker, this religious intolerance is unacceptable. Our Nation was founded on Christian principles but has always believed in the freedom of self-expression and tolerance. We owe it to our men and women in uniform to defend these basic rights. Religious freedom is an integral component of America’s greatness and has been a pillar of our nation from the very beginning. We must remain firmly committed to defending that freedom.