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"Humanist Chaplaincy Opposition Exposes Military Discrimination"

In the Military, religious members have access to chaplains that address their needs, to help them through grief, to cope with the negative consequences of war and to get through existential crises. However, non-religious military members are not accorded the same treatment. We are asking for values-based support for humanists from all chaplains and in this case for the opportunity to have humanists serve as chaplains representing humanism.

In an attempt to correct this situation, in June, Rep. Rob Andrews (D-NJ) called for an amendment permitting non-theistic chaplains to serve in the Armed Forces. He explicitly mentioned that "humanist, ethical culturalist, or atheist" chaplains should be allowed to offer their services to military members.

The amendment was soundly defeated. Rep. Mike Conaway (R-TX) said that atheist chaplains would be unable to properly notify a dead military member's family of his or her death. Such chaplains, he opined, would callously refer to the deceased as "worm food." Rep. John Fleming (R-LA.) said that "The last thing in the world we would want to see" is a non-theistic chaplain for someone trying to cope with death.

Non-theists must not give up the struggle for non-theistic chaplains in the Armed Forces. Though many would prefer a term such as "counselor" to replace "chaplain," it is important that non-theistic military members have the same access to guidance services as do their non-theistic counterparts.

ISHV board member Vincent Parr PhD, an expert on Rational Emotive Behavioral/Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, says:

"The latest statistics reveal that some 20% of the population are either not religious or state that religion plays little to no role in their lives. This percentage was also found to be the fastest growing segment, especially among the young, of those polled about their religious beliefs.

Because there is no reason to believe that this figure would be any different among those entering and serving in the military, it would be important to provide these individuals with counseling that suits their point of view.

Therefore, it is recommended that a Humanist Chaplain be provided for this segment of the military population.”

Jason Heap is being sponsored by the Humanist Society as a humanist celebrant and chaplain. He is highly qualified, and his paperwork for the Department of Defense is in order.

A major problem is that many influential conservative Christians in recent years have been striving to impose their theocratic conception of Christianity upon all members of the military. Not surprisingly, they are opposed to non-theistic chaplains in the military.

ISHV supports the call for non-theistic chaplains in the military, in the name of fairness to all.