



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on January 7, 2013

Obama Criticizes Conscience Protections for Military Chaplains in Defense Bill

As President Obama affixed his signature to this year's \$633 billion defense appropriations bill, he also issued a "signing statement" that included criticism of a provision in the bill that provides conscience protections for military chaplains. Section 533 of the "National Defense Authorization Act" bars the Department of Defense from requiring chaplains to preside at religious functions that violate their moral and religious convictions, such as same-sex wedding ceremonies — which have been occurring with increasing regularity since Congress overturned the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" ban on homosexuals serving in uniform.



Section 533 reads: "No member of the Armed Forces may — (1) require a chaplain to perform any rite, ritual, or ceremony that is contrary to the conscience, moral principles, or religious beliefs of the chaplain; or (2) discriminate or take any adverse personnel action against a chaplain, including denial of promotion, schooling, training, or assignment, on the basis of the refusal by the chaplain to comply with a requirement prohibited by paragraph."

Irked by the overt attempt to block implementation of his homosexual agenda in the military, Obama issued a [signing statement](#) that included a particularly brazen slap at Section 533. Calling the provision "unnecessary and ill-advised," the president insisted that "the military already appropriately protects the freedom of conscience of chaplains and service members."

Obama warned that the secretary of defense would work to "ensure that the implementing regulations do not permit or condone discriminatory actions that compromise good order and discipline or otherwise violate military codes of conduct." He also took the opportunity to re-enforce his commitment to his homosexual constituency, emphasizing that his administration "remains fully committed to continuing the successful implementation of the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell, and to protecting the rights of gay and lesbian service members. Section 533 will not alter that."

That statement, one of several the president made in opposition to provisions in the bill, prompted one chaplain group to express its concern that Obama may simply ignore the conscience protections and begin pressuring chaplains to compromise their religious and moral convictions. The [Chaplain Alliance for Religious Liberty](#) noted that Congress passed the conscience provision with overwhelming bipartisan support. "Chaplains should be able to stand by their faith traditions and honor their commitment to God's Word," said Chaplain Ron Crews, a retired colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve and the group's director. "That's a freedom Congress sought to protect, and the president is not at liberty to disregard the law."



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Crews explained that the simple purpose of the provision is to protect the religious liberties of chaplains who embrace Judeo-Christian convictions concerning sexuality. “Several chaplains have already been faced with requests from same-sex couples to have ceremonies in military chapels,” he noted. “Every member of our armed forces should be able to serve without surrendering their beliefs.”

[World Magazine](#) noted that while Obama does not have the power to veto parts of the defense bill, “he can nullify some of a law’s provisions simply by ordering his administration to ignore them, a practice know as issuing ‘signing statements.’” The magazine recalled that when Obama first ran for president in 2008, he “criticized then President George W. Bush for routinely using signing statements to ignore laws passed by Congress. He pledged then he would not use signing statements to circumvent congressional authority” — a promise he now appears poised to break, once again.



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