



DAN FLYNN

★ DISTRICT 2 ★

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**Representative Flynn Applauds Decision to Allow Prayer in Veteran's Cemeteries**

**Veterans Administration Agrees to Allow Prayer;** a court in Houston will agree to a settlement that will end the religious censorship that has been taking place at veterans' cemeteries. It has been a waging legal battle to uphold the rights of the Veterans, the National Memorial Ladies, and others to invoke God and Christ as they pay tribute to veterans at our national cemeteries.

At the Houston National Cemetery, this policy resulted in veterans' families being deprived of the customary burial ritual that includes a 21-gun salute because it mentions God. A consent decree, agreed to after mediation by former Texas Supreme Court Justice Tom Phillips, will overturn national policies that were hostile to religion.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has agreed to settle a lawsuit over allegations of religious censorship at Houston National Cemetery, according to documents filed in federal court Thursday. Leading politicians, local veterans and volunteer groups had accused VA and cemetery officials of banning them from using religious speech - including the words Jesus and God - during services at the cemetery. The parties reached agreement on the case through mediation with former Texas Supreme Court Chief Justice Tom Phillips, according to the documents.

Rep Flynn stated, "I think it is a sad day in America when we have to go to the court to prove the right of Americans to express their Judeo-Christian religious freedoms put forth by our founding fathers. The Obama administration is once again doing damage to who we are and what we stand for and this cannot be tolerated."

VA officials and attorneys representing the plaintiffs declined to comment until a judge signs off on it.

The documents state that VA will pay attorneys fees and expenses of \$215,000, but the government

admits no liability or fault, and stresses that some provisions of the agreement already were policy or practice at the department. Under the settlement, VA would agree "not to ban, regulate or otherwise interfere with prayers, recitations, or words of religious expression absent family objection" and to allow veterans' families to hold services with any religious or secular content they desire.

VA also agrees not to edit or control private religious speech by speakers at VA-sponsored ceremonies or events and pledges to return a Bible, cross and Star of David to the cemetery's chapel, which must remain open and not be used for storage or referred to as a meeting facility. The Bible, cross and star would be placed "on an open shelf within, but to the side of, the Chapel, where they would be accessible and available for use by families," the documents state.

Local members of Veterans of Foreign Wars District 4 and Houston National Memorial Ladies would resign their positions as official VA volunteers, according to the agreement. They would be free to provide their own texts of recitations to funeral homes so that veterans' families can decide if they would like these groups to provide any services at the cemetery. VA would not interfere in the distribution of condolence cards or gifts containing religious messages or viewpoints and would not ban religious words in oral communications between the volunteers and veteran's families.

VA officials previously stated it was never department policy to ban those words, and that invoking the names of God or Jesus is not only allowed, but common at VA cemeteries across the country. Protesters and many politicians including State Representatives and Congressman have called for VA to fire Houston cemetery director Arleen Ocasio, but her status is not addressed in the agreement. Advocates have vowed to continue pressing for her dismissal.

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