



## House OKs military prayers in Jesus' name

By Staff

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WASHINGTON (BP)--The United States House of Representatives has approved a measure that would permit military chaplains to pray in Jesus' name at public events.

The provision gained approval as part of a \$513 billion Department of Defense authorization bill, which the House passed in a 396-31 vote May 11. The Armed Services Committee had attached the prayer measure to the overall bill before sending it to the full House.

The Senate will still have to approve the language as part of the authorization legislation.

The new language says: "Each chaplain shall have the prerogative to pray according to the dictates of the chaplain's own conscience, except as must be limited by military necessity, with any such limitation being imposed in the least restrictive manner feasible."

The provision seeks to correct what some House members have considered inappropriate military restrictions, especially on evangelical chaplains who normally follow the New Testament pattern of praying in Jesus' name.

The Air Force issued interim guidelines in February that some evangelicals considered a move in the right direction after it had proposed more restrictive rules in 2005. Rep. Walter Jones, R.-N.C., and others said more needed to be done to protect the religious freedom of chaplains. The Navy also has issued guidelines in recent months that permit freedom in prayer by chaplains in voluntary services but call for more limits in public ceremonies in which attendance is required, according to The Washington Post.

"We felt there needed to be a clarification" of the guidelines "because there is political correctness creeping into the chaplains corps," Jones said, The Post reported. "I don't understand anyone being opposed to a chaplain having the freedom to pray to God in the way his conscience calls him to pray."

Rear Adm. Louis Iasiello, the chief of Navy chaplains and a Roman Catholic priest, criticized the provision, however.

"The language ignores and negates the primary duties of the chaplain to support the religious needs of the entire crew" and "will, in the end, marginalize chaplains and degrade their use and effectiveness," Iasiello said in a letter to an Armed Services Committee member, according to The Post.

The difference of opinion between Jones, who is contending especially for many evangelical chaplains, and Iasiello illustrates the clash within the chaplaincy over the guidelines. Many former and current chaplains have complained about limitations on praying in Jesus' name in lawsuits against the Navy. Among these chaplains are 11 Southern Baptists.

After the Air Force issued its initial, interim guidelines in August, Jones led 70 representatives and two senators in October to ask President Bush for an executive order protecting the religious freedom of

chaplains, including the right to pray in Jesus' name. Bush, however, did not do so.

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Ken Walker contributed to this report.

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