



*Nurture the Living
Care for the Wounded
Honor the Fallen*

THE FORUM ON THE MILITARY CHAPLAINCY
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21 October 2013

The Honorable Chuck Hagel
Secretary
United States Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 30301

Dear Mr. Secretary,

We are writing to express our support for the Department of Defense (DoD) accepting the application of Mr. Jason Heap as a military chaplain and approving The Humanist Society, which endorses Mr. Heap, as a new endorsing agency.

As you may know, the DoD is currently reviewing the application of Mr. Heap for the military chaplaincy. The Humanist Society, a new endorsing agency, endorses Mr. Heap. The individual application for Mr. Heap and organizational application for the Humanist Society were confirmed received and completed in full (by Navy Recruiting Command and the Armed Forces Chaplains Board (AFCB), respectively) at the beginning of July. Since that time, there has been limited communication and no decision. The Endorsing Agent, Mr. Jason Torpy, has requested and been denied the opportunity to meet with the Navy Chief of Chaplains to discuss the open application and the prospects for future endorsement. The purpose of this letter is to request the Navy and the AFCB complete processing of Mr. Heap's application and issue a decision, forthwith.

Mr. Heap meets all requirements for appointment as a military chaplain. He holds Masters Degrees from Brite Divinity School and the University of Oxford and expects to complete a PhD from Walden University in early 2014. Similarly, the Humanist Society meets the requirements for an endorsing agency laid out in DoD Instruction 1304.28, including the "religious" organization requirements. Furthermore, a listing of over one hundred chaplaincy, divinity school, and denominational leaders, including all major humanist organizations, have signed a "Statement of Principle" supporting the admission of a Humanist chaplain to the military. The time has come for the DoD to approve the admission of the Humanist Society as an endorsing agency, and the admission of Mr. Heap as a Humanist chaplain.

The prime objective of the Chaplain Corps is to provide for the free exercise of religion of service members. This is required by the 1st Amendment, and is codified in military regulations, which provides that "[t]he Department of Defense places a high value on the rights of members of the Military Services to observe the tenets of their respective religions." DoD Instruction 1300.17, para. 4. Military regulations also "provide for the free exercise of religion in the context of military service as guaranteed by the Constitution." DoD Directive 1304.19, para. 4.1. The military chaplaincy should not be allowed to carry out their duties as if "religion" only means divine and supernatural beliefs. Rather, individual soldiers should be accommodated in their beliefs, even if nontheistic.

Minority faith groups, such as Jews, Hindus, and Muslims, are allowed military chaplains, and according to the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, there are more Humanists than any non-

Advocate for a Military Chaplaincy committed to free and diverse religious expression, and to the sacred traditions of personal integrity, selfless compassion, respect for others, and excellence in leadership.

Christian denomination. These service members not only deserve Humanist chaplains, the Constitution and military regulations mandate it. Humanist chaplains would aid this large group of service members in dealing with matters of conscience, a central function of the military chaplaincy. They would also provide the benefit of confidentiality to non-theist service members. This privilege is not available to other type of counselors, such as social workers and mental health counselors. Because of the potential negative impact of seeking nonprivileged counseling might have on military careers, most service members are reluctant to seek assistance for their personal or relationship problems. The military owes it to nontheist service members who face losing life or limb in our various war theatres, and who do not identify with a mainstream religion.

Humanist Chaplains, just as Mormons, Christian Scientists, and Roman Catholics, do not share the beliefs of mainline Protestants, but would certainly minister to all military personnel. Buddhists and Unitarian Universalists allow their chaplains to hold nontheistic beliefs, just like Humanists, and yet Buddhist and Unitarian Universalist chaplains serve honorably. Even now, there are actively serving chaplains who privately harbor nontheistic beliefs, and they are serving honorably, though they must remain closeted about their beliefs. The Dutch military has had Humanist chaplains for 50 years. There is no part of the chaplains' job description that should exclude Humanists, and nontheists already serve as military chaplains.

To facilitate the free exercise of religion and belief, a core principle of the military chaplaincy is pluralism – having a representative chaplaincy where diversity of religion, including nontheists, is valued. As stated in military regulations, the Chaplain Corps “[s]hall serve a religiously diverse population.” DoD Directive 1304.19, para. 4.2. Without Humanist chaplains, pluralism suffers. Today’s Chaplain Corps strains the goal of pluralism and diversity, as nearly two-thirds of all chaplains come from conservative Christian denominations, despite less than 20 percent of service members identifying with these denominations. Though there can be no exact matching of chaplain and general religious demographics, the military should be eager to embrace diversity already in the ranks by admitting its first Humanist chaplain.

Returning now to Mr. Heap’s bid for the chaplaincy, we see an exemplary candidate who exceeds the qualifications required. In particular, Mr. Heap:

- (a) ...and the prospective endorsing agency submitted the appropriate forms and documentation pursuant to DoD Instruction 1304.28, paras. 6.1.1.1, 6.1.1.2 & 6.2.3 and meets the “religious organization” test of being recognized under IRS Code 501(c)(3) and the religious “church” section 170b1A(i);
- (b) ...is fully qualified for service pursuant to DoD Instruction 1304.28, para. 6.1.1.3;
- (c) ...has two years of experience in a religious leadership position pursuant to DoD Instruction 1304.28, para. 6.1.3;
- (d) ...is educationally qualified, having a bachelor’s degree with 120 semester hours and a graduate degree in religious studies with 72 semester hours pursuant to DoD Instruction 1304.28, para. 6.1.4, and from a college accredited by the American Council on Education pursuant to DoD Instruction 1304.28, para. 6.2; and
- (e) ...meets the physical standards of DoD Instruction 1304.28, para. 6.4.1, along with those requirements of DoD Directive 6130.3(Ref. (f)) and DoD Instruction 1310.02.

Our understanding is that the next administrative step is for the Navy Recruiting Command to forward a letter to the AFCB stating that Mr. Heap is fully qualified in his officer application. That will allow the AFCB to approve the Humanist Society as a new endorser of military chaplains. After this, the Navy will have a qualified endorser and be able to complete the processing of Mr. Heap’s application. Furthermore, DoD agencies should be cooperating closely with the Humanist Society as a prospective new endorser.

With only minor administrative actions performed for nearly three months, it is time for DoD to approve the application of the Humanist Society to become an endorser, and Mr. Heap's application to serve as a chaplain.

Please find enclosed the "Statement of Principle" signed by a wide and diverse group of national religious leaders who call upon the DoD to do the right thing under the Constitution and its own regulations

Thank you for your consideration and action on this matter.

Very truly yours,

The Forum on the Military Chaplaincy

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cf:

Hon. Chuck Hagel, Secretary of Defense
Hon. Ray Mabus, Secretary of the Navy
ADM Jonathan Greenert, Chief of Naval Operations
RADM Mark Tidd, Chief of Navy Chaplains
Chaplain (Col.) Jerry Pitts, Executive Director, AFCB
CAPT Diana Meehan, Senior Recruiter, Navy Recruiting Command