



Veterans organization calls for White House to recognize atheists in the military

The Military Association of Atheists & Freethinkers (MAAF) requests the Office of the President recognize the importance of supporting atheists in the military. In last night's State of the Union Address, President Obama presented a message that privileged some at the expense of nontheists. He took time to recognize troops who are "Christian and Hindu, Jewish and Muslim." Because these groups are not large, they must be the 'acceptable' religious beliefs. All the selected groups except Christian are less well represented than atheists in the military. President of Atheists of Florida and Vietnam veteran John Kieffer asks, "What are chaplains and military leaders doing to reach out to nontheists?"

A 2010 review by MAAF of Defense Manpower Data Agency data for all branches of service, including active duty, reserve, and National Guard components, showed 23.4% of troops identify as Atheist, Agnostic, or No Religious Preference. Jewish personnel totaled 0.31%, Muslims 0.22%, and Hindu 0.05%. Atheists alone were at 0.39%, larger than the each of the three groups the President chose to recognize. "The military suffers from a perception that some world views are acceptable, like Jewish, Hindu, and Muslim, while Christianity is privileged, and nontheists are ostracized," said Jason Torpy, President of the Military Association of Atheists & Freethinkers and Iraq veteran.

President Obama courageously acknowledged the service of gay soldiers and yet overlooked nearly a quarter of the military. MAAF is excited about the prospects of a military where gays may serve openly. Unfortunately, the repeal of DADT has not changed the continuing marginalization of nontheists in the military, including atheists, agnostics, humanists, freethinkers, and those preferring no religious identification. Nontheistic troops deserve the same support and recognition afforded to religious service members. The President used the State of the Union Address to publicize 'acceptable' religions, but he can still recognize all troops by issuing a directive for chaplains and leaders to support atheists in the military.

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