

Obama calls Conscience Clause for Military Chaplains “Ill-Advised”

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By Todd Starnes

Religious liberty advocates are concerned after President Obama said a conscience clause that would allow military chaplains to opt-out of performing gay marriages is “unnecessary and ill-advised.”

“Every member of our armed forces should be able to serve without surrendering their beliefs,” said Ron Crews, executive director of the Chaplain Alliance for Religious Liberty.

The clause is in the National Defense Authorization Act signed by President Obama on Thursday – but he issued a statement noting his objections to Section 533 – the clause protecting chaplains.

The section reads, “No member of the Armed Forces may — 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 discriminate or take any adverse personnel action against a chaplain.”

The provision was introduced by former Rep. Todd Akin, in response to President Obama’s appeal of the military’s “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy.

“Section 533 is an unnecessary and ill-advised provision, as the military already appropriately protects the freedom of conscience of chaplains and services members,” Obama wrote. “My 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.”

The president’s statement alarmed religious liberty advocates like Crews.

“Chaplains should be able to stand by their faith traditions and honor their commitment to God’s Word,” he said. “That’s a freedom that Congress sought to protect, and the president is not at liberty to disregard the law.”

Crews said several chaplains have already been faced with requests from same-sex couples wanting to have ceremonies in military chapels.

“The purpose of these provisions is simply to protect the religious liberties of military chaplains...

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