

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 29, 2007

The Honorable Gordon H. Mansfield  
Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, N.W.  
Washington D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Mansfield:

It has recently come to our attention that the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) has banned the recitation of a common flag-folding ceremony sometimes used by cemetery employees and volunteers at the 125 national cemeteries. It is our understanding that the change in policy was prompted by one complaint at Riverside National Cemetery in California.

In this particular case, someone objected to one of the many religious references in the flag-folding ceremony. We find it appalling that the change in policy may prohibit national cemetery employees and volunteers from reciting the 13 steps, and that the ban extends to Veterans Service Organizations like the American Legion and the VFW, which often provide volunteers to assume flag-folding duties and the playing of Taps at veterans' funerals.

Religion and government must interact while co-existing in society. In 1997 the Supreme Court decision *Agostini v. Felton*, identified three primary criteria for determining whether a government action has a primary effect of advancing religion: 1) government indoctrination, 2) defining the recipients of government benefits based on religion, and 3) excessive entanglement between government and religion. It is clear the 13-flag recital, if requested by the family, does not reach the threshold established by the courts.

In our opinion, the outright ban of this ceremony made to provide uniformity in military funeral services at military cemeteries is an unnecessary response. The folding of the flag is a solemn moment at a military funeral and for many families of veterans it has tremendous meaning. The very essence of a funeral is spiritual and if a family wants the 13 steps recited they should make that choice, not some bureaucrat in Washington. Our veterans deserve better.

We request that you reconsider this decision and adopt the policy that the recitation of the flag-folding ceremony shall be allowed if the family of the deceased makes the request. We feel our veterans have rightfully earned this honor if the family of the deceased so chooses.

Sincerely,

  
Ken Calvert  
Member of Congress

  
Steven C. LaTourette  
Member of Congress

George Richmond

David Olson

Van Burkhaan

Derrin Nemes

Roy J. Weber

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Blomquist

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John Klein

Tom Sullivan

Mary Falleri

Basileto MD 6

Eui Lentz

Kane Camp

Buck McLean

Steve King

John J. ...

Mary Bon

[Signature]

Paul C Brown  
GA10

Ken McCall

Connie Mack

Frank ...

Jan Carter

T. ...

W. ...

Omar ...

Ed Royce

John ...

Sam ...

Joe Wilson

AP ...

Bill Sali

Don M. McHugh

Jack Kingston

[Signature]

Pete Hockett

Ciff Stearns

Jim Jordan

Museum (146)

Ben Gung

Pat Tiberti

Rob Day

John Hokeys

William M. L.

Frank Dreier

MSI Reg MI

David E. Jones

Robin Hayes

AT&T TV-2

Kenneth Ehlers

Dir. Bell

James Baker

Geoff Jarvis

Christopher Shays

Bill Shuster

Gene Schmidt

Joyce P. H. S.

Marie Lehmann

Quinn Tamm

Ralph M. Hall

E. Whitfield

John T. Dutton

Don Burton

Jerry Lewis

Joe Barton

Wayne T. Gibbrest

Lowell Wells

J. Saxton

Fred R. Platte

Theresa Drake

Robert B. Adenhart

Steve King

Nancy Byrd

Barry Miller

Ch. T. Bentley, Jr.

Mike Simpson

Mark Amodeo

Jeff Miller

Jim Campbell

John E.

Sue Myrick

Rodney Alexander

Ernie Haly

Thomas Price

Doug Lambert

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Charles W Dent

Julie Woy

Patricia

Ginny Brown-Wait

John Culberson

Adrian Smith

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CA49

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Thomas Price  
GA06

of Lady York

Joy W. Hs

Jay Mill

Mike Ryan (AL-3)

Bob [unclear] (FL-09)

John Borgman

Jeff IL19

Carrie Smith  
NJ-3

Lynell [unclear] CA-3

Sam Johnson TX

Tom Felt

Al W Dent (PA-15)

Marilyn Musgrave  
CO-04

Dave Weldon

Willa Swaney

Randy Newman

Sam Carter (173)

Kevin Brady

Ken Gray

Frank Stranek

Mac 7 U

Wally Hergen

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Henry Lee Seltman

Joe Terry

[Signature]

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NOTE: 113 Signatories minus the duplicates noted below  
p. 1

George Radanovich  
Vern Buchanan  
Roger Wicker  
Jeb Hensarling  
John Kline  
Mary Fallin  
Eric Cantor  
Buck McKeon

David Hobson  
Devin Nunes  
John Mica  
Todd Tihart  
Tom Latham  
Roscoe Bartlett  
Dave Camp  
Steve King

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James Sensenbrenner  
Jim Gerlach  
Kevin McCarthy  
Fred Upton  
Thaddeaus McCotter  
Donald Manzullo  
Frank LoBiando  
Joe Wilson

Mary Bono  
Paul C. Brown  
Connie Mack  
John Porter  
Todd Akin  
Ed Royce  
John Shimkus  
Rodney Frelinghuysen

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Bill Sali  
John McHugh  
Jack Kingston  
Chris Cannon  
Pete Hoekstra

Cliff Stearns  
Jim Jordan  
Peter Roskam

Bill Young  
Pat Tiberi  
Doc Hastings  
John Shadegg  
Michael McCaul  
David Dreier  
Michael Rogers (MI)  
Daniel Lungren

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Robin Hayes  
Ted Poe  
Vern Ehlers  
Brian P. Bilbray  
Spencer Bachus  
Geoff Davis

Christopher Shays  
Bill Shuster  
Jean Schmidt  
Joseph Pitts  
Lorine Gohmert  
Duncan Hunter

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Ralph M. Hall  
John Doolittle  
Jerry Lewis  
Wayne Gilcrest

Ed Whitfield  
Dan Burton  
Joe Barton  
Dave Weldon  
Jim Saxton

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Todd R. Platts  
Thelma Drake  
Robert B. Aderholt

Steve King  
Nancy Boyda  
Gary S. Miller

C.W. Boustany  
Mike Simpson  
Geoff Davis  
Jeff Miller  
John Campbell

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John Culberson  
Sue Myrick  
Rodney Alexander  
Kenny Hulshof  
Thomas Price  
Doug Lamborn

Charles W. Dent  
Frank Wolf  
Bob Inglis  
Ginny Brown-Waite  
John Culberson  
Adrian Smith

p. 8  
Darrell Issa  
Thomas Price  
J. Randy Forbes  
(Joseph Pitts)  
Mike Ryan  
(Mike Rogers) duplicate  
Gus Bilirakis  
John Boozman

(John Shimkus) duplicate  
(Adrian Smith) duplicate  
Lynn Westmoreland  
Sam Johnson  
Tom Petri  
Charles Dent  
Marilyn Musgrave  
(Dave Weldon) duplicate

p. 9

Mike Thompson

John Carter

Kay Granger

Mac Thornberry

Randy Neugebauer

Kevin Brady

Trent Franks

Wally Herger

p. 10

Ileana Ros-Lehtinen

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Lee Terry