

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 4, 2010

The Honorable Robert M. Gates
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
Pentagon, Room 3E880
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Gates:

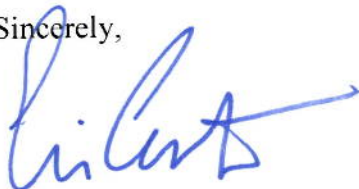
We recently discovered that the Air Force has rescinded an invitation to Dr. Tony Perkins to speak at its National Prayer Luncheon, because statements posted on the website of the organization he leads are purportedly at odds with the positions of the President. This action troubles us a great deal, not only in this particular case, but because of the implications for anyone who might disagree with the Administration in the future.

The luncheon in which Dr. Perkins, a former Marine, was scheduled to participate was designed as a time of prayer, not a policy discussion. With a brief letter sent on January 29, Chaplain Lt. Col. Gary Bertsch informed Dr. Perkins that he was rescinding the invitation "due to statements posted on the Family Research Council website which are incompatible in our role as military members who serve our elected officials and our Commander in Chief." No further explanation of these statements nor the alleged incompatibility was provided.

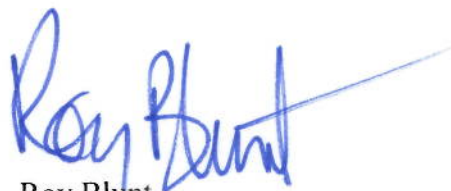
What is clear from this letter, however, is the establishment of a new litmus test: if one disagrees with the President, that person is not welcome to participate in military activities. Holding private citizens to such a standard – one not even expected of senior military officials who are often asked to give their expert opinion to Congress – is incredibly disconcerting. The chilling impact such a standard could have on the free speech of private citizens and those who serve in our armed forces – guaranteeing precisely these types of freedoms – cannot be allowed to stand.

We respectfully ask for a reply to this letter, informing us of the written or unwritten policies that led to the decision to rescind Dr. Perkins's invitation to participate in the Air Force's National Prayer Luncheon. Specifically, is it the policy of the Air Force and/or other branches of the armed services to allow only those individuals who agree with the President on all matters of policy to participate in ministry events they host?

Sincerely,



Eric Cantor
Member of Congress



Roy Blunt
Member of Congress