

COURT CHECKS NAVY'S ANTI-RELIGIOUS BIAS

In recent years, the armed forces has done a very poor job protecting the religious liberties of men and women in uniform. When it comes to granting religious exemptions from the Covid-19 vaccination, the Army and the Navy have the worst record. The good news is that the Navy got its anti-religious bias checked this week by a federal court of appeals.

There have been approximately 16,000 requests by members of the armed forces for a religious exemption from the vaccine, a mere 15 of which have been approved. The Air Force has approved nine of them; the Marines have granted six. No one in the Army or Navy has been approved.

Regarding the Navy's flat-out denial of religious exemptions for anyone, the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled on February 28 that "Defendants have not demonstrated 'paramount interests' that justify vaccinating these 35 plaintiffs [which include Navy SEALs] against COVID-19 in violation of their religious beliefs." More than 99% of active-duty members of the Navy have been vaccinated.

It is not as though the Navy does not believe in exemptions from the vaccine—it's just that it has a problem with those seeking an exemption on religious grounds. For example, regarding active-duty members, the Navy has approved at least 10 permanent medical exemptions, 259 temporary ones, and 60 administrative exemptions (e.g., in cases involving time in service until separation or retirement).

Why the animus? Why is the Navy (and the Army) opposed to granting religious exemptions? Their hostility is as immoral as it is unconstitutional.

As the Supreme Court has noted, the Religious Freedom

Restoration Act (RFRA) of 1993 affords “greater protection for religious exercise than is available under the First Amendment.” Indeed, the only way the Navy can succeed in its quest to deny religious liberty is to prove to the courts that it has a “compelling governmental interest” in invoking its rule. But that has been undercut in this instance by its willingness to grant exemptions on secular grounds.

Unfortunately, elites in the military, following the elites in virtually every other sector of society, have been infected with the woke virus: they have become captive to the politically correct mavens who are steering the dominant culture. It certainly wasn't this way when Bill Donohue was in the Air Force in the late Sixties.