

“DON’T ASK, DON’T TELL” ALARMS THE FAITHFUL

Catholic League president Bill Donohue explains why it is necessary for those reviewing the military’s “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy to study the free speech and religious liberty implications of repealing it:

Over the past week, I have had many discussions with people from several religions about the decision to withdraw the invitation previously extended to Tony Perkins from speaking at a National Prayer Luncheon at Andrews Air Force Base. The invitation was pulled because Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, supports “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.” In response, I wrote a letter to Maj. Gen. Darrell D. Jones, Commander of the Air Force District of Washington, expressing my concerns. Recent conversations have convinced me that much more is at issue than just the Perkins travesty.

At issue are the legitimate concerns of many in the Catholic and Protestant communities: What will happen to the free speech and religious liberty rights of those who serve in the military, especially the clergy, if “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” is repealed?

We will now contact the Senate Armed Services Committee asking for a review of the impact that a repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” might have on these First Amendment rights. We will also contact those in charge of leading the assessment of gays in the military, namely, Jeh Johnson, general counsel for the Department of Defense, and Gen. Carter Ham, U.S. Army Forces Europe commander.

What we need to know is obvious. If Perkins, who is a civilian, is being punished for supporting the existing policy, God only knows what will happen to those in uniform if

they voice disapproval of a new policy. Until this constitutional issue is resolved, further review of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" should be put on ice.