

# PENTAGON SEEKS TO GAG SPEECH OF CATHOLICS

In an unusual move, the Pentagon is seeking to muzzle the free speech of Roman Catholics. At issue is whether Catholics in the Air Force can participate in an appeal by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) to protest President Clinton's veto of the bill banning partial birth abortions. The NCCB has asked Catholics to send postcards to their representatives and senators urging them to override President Clinton's veto of the bill.

On May 29, Rev. Msgr. Aloysius R. Callahan, Chancellor of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, wrote to Catholic priests in the military asking them to urge lay Catholics to participate in the protest. On June 7, all senior chaplains were notified that they were barred from doing what the NCCB requested.

William Donohue voiced his thoughts on the issue today:

"It is outrageous that the Pentagon would try to silence the free speech rights of Catholics in the military. It is one thing to say that those in the military should avoid working in an election campaign for Republicans or Democrats, quite another to say that enlisted men and women have no right to send a postcard to their Congressmen and Senators protesting a piece of legislation. And we are not talking about a matter of national security, something the Pentagon might legitimately seek to control. But we are talking about life and death.

"We have heard nothing from President Clinton about this issue. His purported interest in fairness and free speech should logically commit him to oppose this edict, and we look for him to do so. The Catholic League is delighted that the U.S. Civil Rights Commission is looking into this matter."

The Catholic League is the nation's largest Catholic civil rights organization. It defends individual Catholics and the institutional Church from defamation and discrimination.