

House nixes amendment to allow chaplain to pray 'in Jesus' name'

Amendment proposed by Michele Bachmann: Amendment proposed by Michele Bachmann

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The House of Representatives has rejected a proposed amendment that would have allowed military chaplains to close public events with faith-specific prayers.

The amendment, offered by Tea Party favorite Rep. Michele Bachmann (R., Minn.) to the Military Construction Authorization Act, was deemed not relevant to the bill, her office said on May 27.

The amendment would have specified that “a chaplain shall have the prerogative to close the prayer according to the dictates of the chaplain’s own conscience.”

Bachmann’s proposed amendment comes after church-state separationists have tussled with military chaplains over the appropriateness of praying “in Jesus’ name.” Opponents say it’s insulting to nonbelievers and violates the spirit of the government’s religious neutrality; many Christian clergy say they know no other way to pray.

The dispute has most recently played out in Virginia, where Republican Gov. Robert McDonnell lifted a ban on state police chaplains praying in Jesus’ name.

Former military chaplain Rabbi Israel Drazin said the chaplains’ role is different from that of civilian clergy like a rabbi or priest. “They are addressing everybody. They are there for everybody,” he said. “They should not give a prayer that addresses a particular group.”

The Washington-based Secular Coalition for America had rallied against Bachmann's bill, saying it would harm minority rights. "Closing a prayer in a sectarian manner, or in the name of Jesus, would exclude members of the military," said Paul Fidalgo, a spokesman for the group. *-Religion News Service*