

WORLDNETDAILY EXCLUSIVE

WND AT THE WHITE HOUSE

McClellan: Chaplains should be free to express selves

Spokesman talks of freedom of religion, doesn't comment on fasting priest

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By Les Kinsolving
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In today's White House press briefing, presidential press secretary Scott McClellan defended the right of military chaplains to "be able to freely express themselves" but declined to comment directly on the case of one Navy clergyman who is on a hunger strike protesting a Navy policy on prayer.

As WorldNetDaily reported, Lt. Gordon James Klingenschmitt, a Navy chaplain who is an Episcopal priest, says he hasn't eaten since Dec. 20 when he called on President Bush to sign an executive order guaranteeing the right of military chaplains to pray according to their own faith traditions – for example, in Jesus' name.

A 1998 Navy advisory asks chaplains, when praying at "secular events," to pray in an "inclusive" manner, rather than referring to Jesus, Allah or other religion-specific deities. Klingenschmitt hopes Bush will nullify that policy in all the military services.

WND asked McClellan: "Does the president believe that the Navy should



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engage in this suppression of the First Amendment's guarantee of the free exercise of religion?"

Responded the spokesman: "Well, the president believes strongly in the free exercise of religion. And he believes that it's important that our military personnel be able to freely express themselves. ... And we value the contributions of our military chaplains to our men and women in uniform, and we're committed to safeguarding the ability of people to freely express their religious views."

WND pressed on the executive order issue, asking if Bush would sign one guaranteeing chaplains' religious freedom.

"Let me make clear," McClellan said. "I'm not talking about any specific matter, but I'm talking about the principles and what we're committed to doing."

As McClellan walked into the briefing room today, WND asked about last night's victory by the University of Texas, the spokesman's alma mater, over USC in the Rose Bowl.

"Do you and the president know of any athletic victory in world history more glorious than last night?" asked WND.

"It was an amazing game," McClellan said, adding, "Hook 'em horns!"

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