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## Embattled chaplain set to pray with Cheney

By Chris Amos - Staff writer

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A Navy chaplain who is suing Navy Secretary Donald G. Winter for violating his right to religious expression has been invited to deliver a prayer at a conservative political conference that will be keynoted by Vice President Dick Cheney and former U.N. ambassador John Bolton.

But Lt. Gordon J. Klingenschmitt might not be able to wear his uniform to Thursday night's conference at a Washington, D.C., hotel.

That's because a federal appeals court has cleared the way for the Navy to discharge Klingenschmitt immediately — something Klingenschmitt and his lawyer say they hope does not happen.

Navy officials had initially planned to discharge Klingenschmitt on Jan. 31, but a three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia circuit ordered that he be kept on active duty temporarily until they could review his request for a long-term injunction.

But in a one-page statement released Tuesday, the panel wrote that Klingenschmitt "has not demonstrated the stringent standards required" for such an injunction.

Navy officials did not return calls requesting comment Wednesday.

Klingenschmitt was convicted last year of disobeying a lawful order after he wore his uniform to a press conference outside the White House, even though the Navy said it had ordered him not to.

He was sentenced to a suspended fine and a letter of reprimand and resigned from his original endorser, the Evangelical Episcopal

church, shortly afterwards. He said he immediately turned in paperwork showing that he had been endorsed by a new religious organization, the Full Gospel church.

Navy officials do not dispute that, but said they refused to accept the new religious endorsement for Klingenschmitt after reviewing his Navy records — something they say they do every time a chaplain seeks to change endorsers.

Because Navy chaplains cannot serve without an endorsement from a religious organization, Navy officials moved to discharge him.

But William Farley, Klingenschmitt's civilian lawyer, said that Navy regulations require the Navy to accept an endorsement from a qualified endorser.

Klingenschmitt, who has been performing administrative, nonchaplain duties at Naval Station Norfolk, Va., since his conviction, said he has received no notice of impending discharge. He said he would keep fighting even if it does come.

“I vow to continue this lawsuit even as a civilian, if I have to, and I will fight to be reinstated if the Navy tries to kick me out,” he said. “But for now, I am depending on Secretary Winter, [Defense] Secretary [Robert] Gates and Vice President Cheney to do what the president wants and not fire a chaplain for wearing his uniform to pray in Jesus' name.”

The court wrote that Klingenschmitt's lawsuit will be argued on an “expedited basis” in September. Farley said he hoped that fact would convince the Navy to allow him to continue to serve until the lawsuit is argued.

“There is no reason for the Navy to hastily dismiss Chaplain Klingenschmitt when he has given more than 20 years of his life to service of his country in the military,” he said. “The Navy needs chaplains and Chaplain Klingenschmitt is fully qualified and ready to serve with his ecclesiastical endorsement already in place.”

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