

Court blocks dismissal of evangelical Navy chaplain

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Klingenschmitt

After a long battle over his right to pray in Jesus' name while in uniform, a U.S. Navy chaplain who was supposed to be discharged from the service on January 31 got a last-minute reprieve from a three-judge federal panel, allowing him additional time to appeal his termination.

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An evangelical Navy chaplain says an 11th-hour miracle has allowed him to stay in the service at least another week in order to appeal the Navy's decision to fire him for disobeying an order by praying in Jesus' name while in uniform.

The Navy ordered the dismissal of Lieutenant Gordon James Klingenschmitt in the wake of a military court-martial ruling that determined he disobeyed a superior officer's direct order when he prayed in Jesus' name, in uniform, while attending a news conference outside the White House on March 30 of last year.

Klingenschmitt has appealed the ruling to the Secretary of the Navy and now hopes he may be able to stay in the military at least until the case can be heard.

"This was an 11th-hour miracle," the lieutenant contends. "My career was dangling by a thread; but thanks be to God, that thread has not yet been cut," he says. "I was supposed to be kicked out of the Navy on Wednesday. That was going to be my last day of my 15-and-a-half-year career."

According to Klingenschmitt, the Federal Court of Appeals in Washington, DC, intervened "at the 11th hour," issuing a stay of his termination. "It's a short-term delay," he notes. "It's

only going to last about a week, but it will give us one last chance to argue in front of that court of appeals why a Navy chaplain should not be fired for praying in Jesus' name."

Klingenschmitt hopes the powers that be will ultimately allow him to stay in the Navy, especially in light of the fact that Congress has now overturned the Navy regulations requiring non-sectarian prayers outside a chapel setting -- the very policy the military officer says he risked everything to fight.

But even though U.S. lawmakers have now "rescinded the Navy policy that I was punished for," Klingenschmitt says, "they're not going to grandfather that victory back to my case. They're still trying to kick me out." The lieutenant says he hopes the court will rule this week on whether he can stay in the Navy.

If the court's decision goes against him, however, Klingenschmitt says he will proceed with the case as a civilian. No date for the ruling has been set.

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