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United States Senate

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March 12, 2018

Richard V. Spencer
Secretary of the Navy
1000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20350-1000

Admiral John M. Richardson
Chief of Naval Operations
2000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20350-2000

Dear Secretary Spencer and Admiral Richardson:

The Chaplain Corps is an institution older than our nation, first created in 1775 by General George Washington to serve the *religious* needs of his troops. Today, the Chaplain Corps faithfully serves all members of our armed forces without regard to religious preference or belief. Therefore, we are concerned that the Navy may expand the Chaplain Corps beyond its clear purpose of protecting and facilitating the constitutional right of service members to the free exercise of religion. It is our understanding that the Navy Chaplain Appointment and Retention Eligibility Advisory Group (CARE AG) has recommended accepting an applicant to serve in the Corps as a secular-humanist Chaplain.

The Navy's approval would constitute a grave mistake. Approving a secular-humanist Chaplain is inconsistent with the Constitution and the Department of Defense's (DOD) own guidelines. As part of DOD, the Navy has a constitutional obligation under the Religion Clauses of the First Amendment to ensure that service members have access to services that meet their religious needs. The Chaplain Corps exists to fulfill this duty. The Supreme Court has ruled that non-religious beliefs may not rely on the Religion Clauses for protection. Furthermore, DOD's guidelines reinforce the uniquely religious purpose of the Chaplain Corps.

The Navy has sufficient authority to create programs for humanist or atheist service members. The Chaplain Corp is not the appropriate place. The Chaplain Corps serves religious needs, not philosophical preferences. Approving a secular-humanist Chaplain would open the door to other applicants representing other philosophical worldviews. Over time, this situation would erode the distinct religious function of the Chaplain Corps.

We hope that you will act to preserve the integrity of the Chaplain Corps and its long-standing constitutional role. The Navy should reject the application for a secular-humanist Chaplain.

Sincerely,



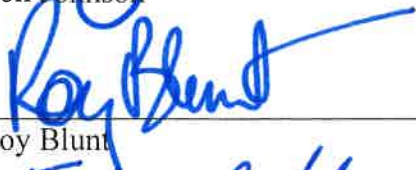
Roger F. Wicker



Mitch McConnell



Ron Johnson



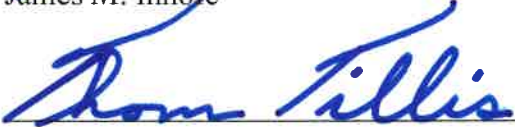
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Tom Cotton



James M. Inhofe



Thom Tillis



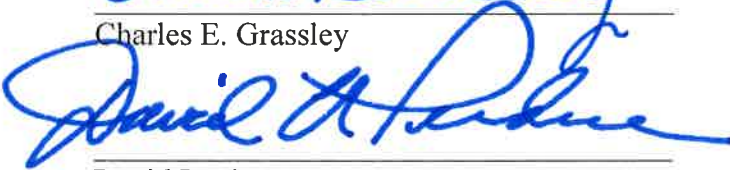
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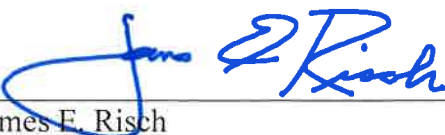
Mike Crapo



Charles E. Grassley



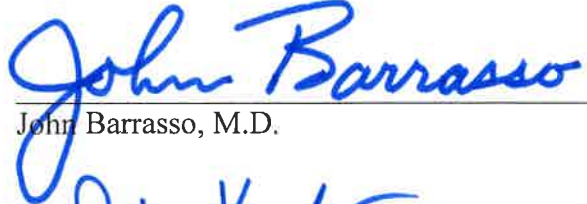
David Perdue



James E. Risch



Michael B. Enzi



John Barrasso, M.D.



John Kennedy



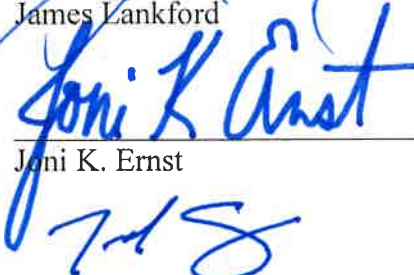
Michael S. Lee



Steve Daines



James Lankford



Joni K. Ernst




Ted Cruz



Tim Scott



John Hoeven



John Boozman