

FRC Vice President: One Judge Could Decide Fate of Religious Freedom in U.S. Military

Lt. Gen. Jerry Boykin, executive vice president of the Family Research Council, sat in on a Court of Appeals of the Armed Forces hearing about a Marine's court martial for posting a Bible verse in her work station.

He said two of the five-judge panel members seemed to take the military's side, while two seemed to take former Marine Lance Cpl. Monifa Sterling's side that she was protected by the First Amendment and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. The chief judge, however, gave no indication how he might side in the case.

Boykin told Radio America the court's decision could have reverberations that affect the entire country.

"If they uphold her appeal and she is exonerated on this, it's a strong, strong message to all of the military that you must protect the religious rights of service members," he said. "On the other hand, if it is upheld and her special court-martial stands, I think it portends the situation in the military with regards to religious freedom is going to decline."

Despite recent "religious freedom" headlines in the military regarding Muslim women allowed to wear hijabs and Sikhs who are allowed to keep their beards, Sterling's court-martial sends a very dangerous message, Boykin added. He said the court-martial and subsequent appeals opinions shows the punishment aimed at the Marine demonstrates selective application of religious freedom rights.

"I think it's selective," he said. "I think if she had been anything other than a Christian this would have been one of those situations in which political correctness would have been the dominant factor. Because she's a Christian, I think they feel very comfortable infringing on her First Amendment rights."