

# Key Question on U.S. Citizenship Test Changed

Score one for an “originalist” view of the First Amendment.

U.S. Sen. James Lankford (R-Okla.), a key member of the House Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, announced Friday that the Department of Homeland Security was changing one of the questions on the citizenship exam. The announcement is the culmination of nearly a year of working with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Division.

At issue was a segment of the exam’s study guide that suggested the First Amendment protects the citizens’ right to “freedom of worship,” rather than freedom of religion. Lankford, who is co-chairman of the Congressional Prayer Caucus and the first senator to join it, first learned of the incorrect wording in June of last year, which prompted a letter to CIS Director Leon Rodriguez.

Lankford explained his issue with the wording again Friday in his announcement applauding the change:

*“At first glance, it appears like a small matter, but it is actually an important distinction for the Constitution and the First Amendment. The ‘freedom of religion’ language reflects our right to live a life of faith at all times, while the ‘freedom of worship’ reflects a right simply confined to a particular space and location.”*

In a letter sent to Lankford’s office Friday, Rodriguez explained the reversal, saying that “upon further consideration,” CIS determined the change could be made because it didn’t involve adding or deleting content. Approximately 40 web-based and printed materials will be changed as a result of the decision.

“In accordance with agency policy, if the applicant’s answer to a civics question is ‘an alternative phrasing of a correct answer,’ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services officers will continue to accept both ‘freedom of religion’ and ‘freedom of worship’ as correct answers to question 51 when administering the naturalization exam,” Rodriguez wrote.

Question 51 reads, “What are two rights of everyone living in the United States?” The study guide originally offered the following correct answers:

- freedom of expression,
- freedom of speech,
- freedom of assembly,
- freedom to petition the government,
- freedom of worship and
- the right to bear arms.

The study materials will now read ‘freedom of religion’ as the correct response. Based on reprinting schedules, they expect all materials to be updated by the end of 2016.

“I applaud the Department of Homeland Security for listening to me and deciding to change their material to reflect our First Amendment right of freedom of religion,” Lankford said after receiving the notification. “We live in a great nation that allows individuals to live out their faith, or have no faith at all. To protect freedom and diversity, we must carefully articulate this right throughout the federal government.”