

Pentagon to Investigate Incident Involving Airman's Religious Freedom

In April, during a retirement ceremony for another airman held at Travis Air Force Base, retired Air Force Sr. Master Sgt. Oscar Rodriguez Jr. began to give a flag-folding speech—as had been requested of him—when he was assaulted by uniformed airmen, forcibly dragged from the event, and removed from the base, all because the speech included “God.”

Earlier this week, First Liberty Institute sent a letter to the Air Force demanding justice for Rodriguez, a 33-year veteran of the Air Force, and for those responsible to be held accountable. Thursday morning, the Pentagon announced Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James has ordered the Air Force Inspector General to review the Air Force's actions.

“Air Force personnel may use a flag folding ceremony script that is religious for retirement ceremonies,” the Air Force said in a statement. “Since retirement ceremonies are personal in nature, the script preference for a flag folding ceremony is at the discretion of the individual being honored and represents the member's views, not those of the Air Force. The Air Force places the highest value of the rights of its personnel in matters of religion and facilitates the free exercise of religion by its members.”

Mike Berry, Director of Military Affairs for First Liberty Institute, said the military's response was “a positive first step toward not only acknowledging that religious scripts may be used at retirement ceremonies, but also ensuring these kinds of situations are not repeated.”

“The Air Force had no right to assault a citizen, much less a 33-year military veteran, because they didn't want him to

mention God,” he said. “Mr. Rodriguez has a constitutional right to free speech and religious expression, even on a military base.

“The military broke the law and abused its power. We expect the Air Force to hold those responsible accountable, and allow Mr. Rodriguez to continue honoring the flag and other veterans who have sacrificed for our country.”