

Air Force's Dismissal of Religious Violations as 'Perception': Incompetence or Bad Excuse?

Testifying before the House Armed Services Committee on Friday, the Air Force chief of staff, Gen. Mark Welsh, dismissed the concern over the growing violations of religious freedom in the Air Force as a "perception."

U.S. Reps. John Fleming, R-La.; Doug Lamborn, R-Colo.; Michael Turner, R-Ohio; Mike McIntyre, D-N.C.; Randy Forbes, R-Va.; and Michael Conaway, R-Texas; all expressed concerns over the suppression of religious expression within the Air Force.

Instead of addressing the concerns raised by the reports covered by a number of media outlets, Welsh lashed out at Fox News, claiming the stories were not accurate. The general went on to say that the "perception" of religious persecution has been the "single biggest frustration [he's] had in this job."

Last fall, Family Research Council (FRC) and other members of the Restore Military Religious Freedom Coalition met with Air Force leadership to deliver 220,000 petitions expressing concerns regarding the growing trend of infringements on the constitutional liberties of service members in all uniforms.

The officials also received a copy of the coalition's report documenting dozens of other violations of service members' religious liberties. This past weekend, 22,000 signed a new petition to the Air Force Academy in regard to a cadet's Bible verse that was erased from a whiteboard. Over the weekend, Gideons International reported that Maxwell Air Force Base will no longer allow the group to hand out Bibles to new recruits.

"The *perception* is that Mikey Weinstein is setting the policy for religious expression in the U.S. Air Force, as evidenced by the growing number of incidents of religious hostility toward Christians," said FRC President Tony Perkins in a statement.

"Instead of denying reality, Gen. Welsh should have taken the opportunity in Friday's hearing to discuss how he would bring the Air Force into compliance with the new DOD [Department of Defense] instructions protecting religious expression, and thereby protect men and women of faith from discrimination and harassment," Perkins continued.

"Family Research Council and the Restore Military Religious Freedom Coalition will not stand by while the Air Force chief tries to evade the reality of these attacks on religious expression. We will continue to do all we can to protect the rights of the men and women serving in the Air Force and in all the uniformed services," Perkins concluded.