

Obama's VA Christmas Tree Ban Sparks Yuletide Uprising

Folks around Salem, Virginia, were ready to jingle the government's bells after they implemented a ban on Christmas trees and religious Christmas carols in the public spaces of the local VA hospital.

The holiday hullabaloo began last week when workers received an email announcing that Christmas trees would no longer be allowed in public spaces at the Salem Veterans Affairs Medical Center.

"Trees (regardless of the types of ornaments used) have been deemed to promote the Christian religion and will not be permitted in any public areas this year," the email stated.

According to the federal government's telling of the Christmas story, not only did the three wise men delivered gold, frankincense and myrrh—they also brought along a Douglas fir adorned with sparkling lights.

The VA also warned employees that "public areas may only be decorated in a manner that is celebratory of the winter season."

In other words, candy canes are good, the baby Jesus is bad.

"Displays must not promote any religion," they noted.

The VA went so far as to tell workers what kind of "holiday" music was permissible according to government standards.

"Music travels and should be secular (non-religious) and appropriate to the work environment," the email stated.

The VA decided to go into full Grinch-mode and ban visiting entertainers from warbling any Christmas carol that included

the words "Christ" or "Christmas."

"They told me I could sing 'Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer' but I couldn't sing about Christ," Pastor John Sines, Jr. told me. "I couldn't sing about anything that had the word Christmas in it. I could sing what they referred to as 'holiday' songs."

The Rev. Sines, the pastor at Rock Pike Baptist Church in Forest, Virginia, was a bit flustered by the rules. All he wanted to do was entertain the veterans.

"My agenda wasn't so I could push Jesus on the veterans," he said. "I just wanted to honor the veterans and to say thank you."

So the good reverend politely told the VA Hospital that he was not going to abide by the rules.

"I let those folks know I wasn't going to be bullied into their way of thinking," he said. "We're rednecks. We don't have no problem standing our ground."

Pastor Sines said he wasn't trying to cause any trouble—he just wanted to do what the Constitution allowed him to do.

"I have a Constitution that protects my freedom and I have God, who said He would protect me from everything else," the pastor told me.

In addition to Pastor Sines—the VA had to contend with outraged employees and veterans and the local townsfolk. So on Friday—they reached a compromise.

Pastor Sines said he was re-invited to perform and Christmas trees will once again be allowed in the public spaces—so long as other faiths are also represented.

That includes "the Jewish Menorah, or Hanukkah Lamp, and the Kwanzaa Mkeka (decorative mat) or Kinara (candleholder)."

They cited VA Directive 0022, titled, "Religious Symbols in Holiday Displays in VA Facilities." The directive states that religious symbols may only be allowed in a public area if they display does not favor one religion over another, and conveys a primarily secular message.

So the only way folks can celebrate Christmas is if they also celebrate Kwanzaa and Hanukkah.

"This compromise allows for the Salem VAMC to be in full compliance with Federal mandates that prohibit U.S. government facilities, including the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, from 'favoring one religion over another' while providing the diversity and flexibility for employees and Veterans to celebrate the holidays according to their individual faith structure," the VA stated.

Sounds to me like somebody's been smoking too much mistletoe.

The federal government may cite VA directive 0022 for its definition of Christmas—but I prefer to cite the holy Bible. And the Good Book declares that Jesus is the Reason for the Season not a decorative mat.