

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 18, 2013

Lt. General Michelle D. Johnson
Superintendent
2304 Cadet Drive, Suite 3300
U.S. Air Force Academy, CO 80840-5001

Dear Lt. Gen. Johnson:

It has come to our attention that the Air Force Academy removed a poster portraying the words of the Academy oath, and the Academy's Honor Review Committee considered removing the phrase "so help me God" from the Honor Oath recited by all incoming Cadets. On October 25, 2013, you announced that the final phrase contained in the oath is now optional. We respectfully request confirmation as to who made the decision to reconsider the oath and remove the poster, as well as the reason for which the poster was removed.

While we fully support the Academy's retention of "so help me God" in the Honor Oath, our concerns do not end here. The 2012 edition of the Contrails Cadet Handbook contains the text of four military oaths: the Cadet's Oath of Allegiance; the Oath of Office for Officers; the Oath of Enlistment, and the Honor Oath. In the 2012 edition of the handbook, only the Honor Oath contains the phrase "so help me God."

The Oath of Office for Officers, as it is enumerated in the United States Code, ends with "so help me God." 5 U.S.C. § 3331. The Oath of Enlistment, as it is enumerated in the United States Code, ends with "so help me God." 10 U.S.C. § 502. The Cadet's Oath of Allegiance, as it enumerated in the Code of Federal Regulations, ends with "so help me God." 32 CFR § 901.26.

"So help me God" is not a Twentieth Century addition to the historic oath of service. The Continental Congress passed two versions of an oath for officers, the first on October 21, 1776 and the second on February 3, 1778. Both versions ended with the singular sentence, "So help me God." Though not included in the first oath approved by Congress in 1789, the phrase was again included in the oath for officers in 1862, and has remained as part of the oath to this very day.

We request a detailed explanation as to why the Contrails Cadet Handbook omits "so help me God" from these oaths, despite the fact that the phrase is used in the very statutory language of the United States Code, and was a part of the military oath drafted by the Founders themselves.

The Constitution does not require that this phrase be scrubbed from the oath. The First Amendment to the United States Constitution prohibits the establishment of religion; however, the inclusion of the phrase "so help me God" in an oath of service does not rise to this level. The phrase is included in the oath of office taken by all elected or appointed officials, including Members of Congress. 5 U.S.C. § 3331. Including the phrase "so help me God" in an oath of service is a deeply-rooted American tradition—a tradition that was begun by George Washington at his inauguration as the first President of the United

States. As you know, courts consistently have upheld the constitutionality of similar acknowledgements of the Divine, such as “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance, as well as of our national motto, “In God we Trust.”

Removing the poster and editing the oath for all Academy students is extreme and unnecessary, and does a disservice to the countless individuals who wish to include the phrase as a solemn reminder that they are pledging their fidelity to God and country. It is our sincere hope that those cadets who wish to include the solemnity of “so help me God” in their administration of the oath will always be supported by the Air Force Academy in doing so.

We urge you to edit the Contrails Cadet Handbook to properly reflect the language of the Cadet’s Oath of Office for Officers, the Oath of Allegiance, and of the Oath of Enlistment to reflect their original statutory language in full. Finally, we ask that you restore the poster bearing the oath in full to its original location as an honorable reflection of the oath of service. Thank you for your attention to this matter and we look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely,



JIM BRIDENSTINE (OK-01)
Member of Congress



J. RANDY FORBES (VA-04)
Member of Congress



FRANK R. WOLF (VA-10)
Member of Congress



MICHELE BACHMANN (MN-06)
Member of Congress



MIKE POMPEO (KS-04)
Member of Congress



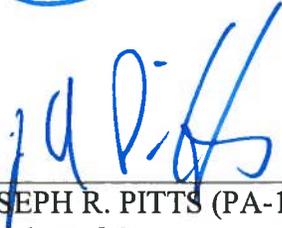
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Member of Congress



JACK KINGSTON (GA-01)
Member of Congress



STEVAN PEARCE (NM-02)
Member of Congress



JOSEPH R. PITTS (PA-16)
Member of Congress



BILL JOHNSON (OH-06)
Member of Congress



PAUL C. BROUN (GA-10)
Member of Congress



JOE WILSON (SC-02)
Member of Congress



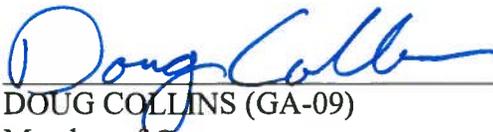
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JOHN FLEMING (LA-04)
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DOUG COLLINS (GA-09)
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VICKY HARTZLER (MO-04)
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WALTER B. JONES (NC-03)
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TRENT FRANKS (AZ-08)
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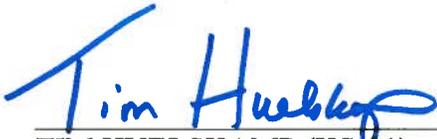
LOUIE GOHMERT (TX-01)
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KENNY MARCHANT (TX-24)
Member of Congress



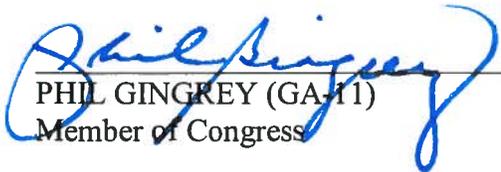
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