

REPORT

from the Capital

Pentagon releases rules on religious attire, receives mixed reaction

An updated military policy on uniform and grooming standards is being hailed as a welcome step by some religious groups, while Sikhs say it maintains “the presumptive ban” on their articles of faith.

On Jan. 22, the Pentagon released an updated “instruction” on accommodating religious practices, saying that requests will be honored “unless they have an adverse effect on military readiness, mission accomplishment, unit cohesion, and good order and discipline,” said Lt. Cmdr. Nate Christensen, a Defense Department spokesman.

The new policy says a religious accommodation request “may be denied only when the military policy, practice, or duty” furthers a compelling governmental interest, is the least restrictive means of doing so, and only if “the needs of mission accomplishment outweigh the needs of the Service member.”

Rajdeep Singh, director of law and policy for the Sikh Coalition, said the rules “fall short” of Sikh leaders’ hopes for greater accommodation.

“If a Sikh wants to join the military under the new rules, there is no guarantee that he will be granted a religious accommodation,” he said. “Even if an accommodation is granted, it can be revoked at any time under the new rules if you’re transferred to a new duty station or base.”

Asked about the Sikhs’ concerns, Christensen said that he could only discuss the policy — which addresses everything from tattoos to holy days — and the military would deal with requests on a case-by-case basis. Factors determining whether a request can be granted include whether religious apparel interferes with protective equipment such as helmets and masks.



RNS photo by Adelle M. Banks

Army Maj. Kamaljeet Singh Kalsi, seen here at a Jan. 29 hearing, said Sikhs will continue to petition Congress and the military to change the policy to prevent Sikhs from having to “choose between God and country. Nobody should be put into that situation.”

Three Sikh military members accepted into the military since 2009 have proved that they can meet such requirements while maintaining their practices of wearing beards and turbans, Singh said. It is an article of faith for Sikh men to wear beards and to not cut their hair.

“Sikhs are able to wear smaller turbans that can fit under helmets,” he said.

Sikhs such as Maj. Kamaljeet Singh Kalsi, a Bronze Star medalist, sometimes wear a turban made out of camouflage material.

Other religious groups that have worked for accommodation, meanwhile, hailed the new regulations.

“We welcome the important decision to broaden the religious rights of American military personnel and hope this updated policy will allow all those in uniform to practice their faith while serving the nation,” said Nihad Awad, national executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations.

Hiram Sasser, director of litigation for Liberty Institute, said the burden for acceptance of religious practice will now be with the Department of

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Capitol Hill hearing focuses on military chaplains, lawmakers' concerns about bias

Lawmakers peppered Pentagon officials Jan. 29 about claims that military chaplains have faced discrimination for their beliefs, and time and again, chaplains and personnel officials said they were unaware of any bias.

Virginia Penrod, deputy assistant secretary of defense for military personnel policy, told the House Subcommittee on Military Personnel that she could not cite specific instances where chaplains had to preach a sermon or oversee a ceremony that conflicted with their beliefs.

"There's absolutely nothing in policy or code that prohibits a chaplain from praying according to the dictates of their faith," she said.

In recent years, conservative activists have complained that

some military chaplains have been restricted in fully preaching their beliefs or have been muzzled or forced to follow policies they disagree with.

The hearing came a week after the Pentagon released an updated "instruction" on accommodating religious practices. Sikhs concerned about the need for greater accommodation showed up at the packed hearing room to provide written statements. Penrod said additional updates, including specific policies about chaplains, will be completed this summer.

Members of the panel questioned whether military commanders are allowed to proselytize. Brig. Gen. Charles R. Bailey, the Army's deputy chief of chaplains, said it would be "wrong" for commanders to say that their

faith is superior to any other, but other kinds of private conversations about faith are permitted.

"They're never told they cannot share their own personal faith of any sort," he said.

Some members of Congress seem to have a different impression from the military's top chaplains about the state of religious accommodation in the military, said the Rev. James Beattie Magness, the Episcopal Church's bishop suffragan for Federal Ministries.

"There's a real disconnect," said Magness, "if things are being said to members of Congress that are not getting to the chiefs of chaplains. I don't have a reason for why."

—*Religion News Service with BJC Staff Reports*



Military experts testify on Jan. 29 at a House Military Personnel Subcommittee hearing. Pictured from left to right: Virginia Penrod, deputy assistant secretary of defense for military personnel policy; Navy Chief of Chaplains Mark Tidd; Army Deputy Chief of Chaplains Charles Bailey; U.S. Air Force Deputy Chief Chaplain Bobby Page; Episcopal Bishop James Magness. *Religion News Service photo by Adelle M. Banks*

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Defense, not the service member.

"DOD must prove its case and the individual service member engaging in religious speech automatically gets the benefit of the doubt," he said.

Rabbi Sanford Dresin, director of military programs for the Florida-based Aleph Institute, helped an Orthodox Hasidic rabbi win a case in 2011 that permitted him to keep his beard and serve as an active-duty military chaplain.

"I feel that DOD has heretofore talked about diversity and multiculturalism," he said, "and now they're putting their money where their mouth is."

He said Rabbi Menachem Stern's beard did not prevent him from passing the necessary tests for using a gas mask.

Dresin said his only concern is whether the individual military services will implement the updated policy without extra roadblocks.

"They've learned to live with the repeal of DADT ("don't ask, don't tell") and so I think they can get along very well with yarmulkes and beards," he said.

—*Adelle M. Banks, Religion News Service with BJC Staff Reports*

REFLECTIONS

RFRA's constitutionality called into question



J. Brent Walker
Executive Director

When the U.S. Supreme Court hears oral arguments on March 25 in the contraception case involving Hobby Lobby and Conestoga Wood Specialties, it will be asked to decide novel and difficult questions concerning the interpretation and application of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). Readers of this publication and even casual Court observers are aware of these uncharted issues. Can commercial, for-profit corporations exercise religion? Can the shareholders' rights of conscience be imputed to the corporation? Can their exercise of religion be "substantially burdened" by objectionable activity provided by an insurance company and chosen by female employees? Does government have a compelling interest in making sure all women have access to preventive health care services, like contraceptives, sufficient to justify that burden?

But this case is not just about interpreting and applying RFRA. One of the more than 80 friend-of-the-court briefs marshals a frontal assault on RFRA's constitutionality. No matter how the High Court interprets RFRA and applies it to the facts in this case, it must not summarily declare it unconstitutional.

This brief filed by Marci Hamilton, who teaches at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, on behalf of the Freedom from Religion Foundation and others, contends that RFRA is unconstitutional on its face. The brief mistakenly argues that RFRA violates the First Amendment's ban on the establishment of religion. To the contrary, RFRA is a permissible accommodation of the exercise of religion; it is not an unconstitutional advancement of religion. As the Court has made clear, there is "room for play in the joints" between what the Free Exercise Clause requires and the Establishment Clause forbids. Hundreds of religious exemptions populate federal and state law strengthening religious liberty without impermissibly establishing religion.

If Congress can grant religious exemptions on a case-by-case basis, what is wrong with making these accommodations, as it did in RFRA, all at once? In fact, one could argue that this wholesale approach to accommodation is even less likely to risk establishing religion than the case-by-case retail version. The latter creates outright exemptions from government regulation, RFRA does not. RFRA instead provides a balancing test that is applied to the facts of each dispute: When the government substantially burdens religious exercise but can show that it is advancing a compelling interest, it can win every RFRA claim that comes to court. It is worth noting, when the Supreme Court struck down RFRA as applied to the states on federalism grounds in *City of Boerne v. Flores* (1997), only Justice John Paul Stevens, now retired, thought that RFRA violated the Establishment Clause.

The brief also argues that RFRA is flawed because

it violates the separation of powers doctrine. This is wrong, too. In passing RFRA, Congress was not seeking to exercise judicial power or trying to tell the courts how to interpret the Constitution. It was simply seeking to protect by statute the exercise of religion in a way that the Supreme Court refused to do.

Constitutional rights establish a floor; they do not erect a ceiling. A co-equal branch of government is free to ratchet up rights ensured by the Constitution. Congress has the authority, under the necessary and proper clause of the Constitution's Article I, to regulate the ways in which the federal government and its agencies deal with religious liberty issues. Indeed, the Court has already applied RFRA to the federal government in *Gonzales v. O Centro Espirita Beneficente Uniao Do Vegetal* (2006), albeit without specifically addressing the constitutionality of doing so.

Another brief also raises a constitutional issue, focusing specifically on how RFRA is applied in this case. This brief was filed on behalf of church-state scholars and authored by Brigham Young University Law School professor Frederick Mark Gedicks. He argues that, if the Court were to allow owners of a for-profit corporation to shift the burden and cost of protecting their own conscience — in this case, forcing female employees to forgo or purchase for themselves contraception services — it would, in that narrow circumstance, violate the Establishment Clause.

This argument has some merit. The Court struck down a state law in *Estate of Thornton v. Caldor, Inc.* (1985) that gave workers an absolute right to have their Sabbath accommodated in the workplace, because the law would effectively require other workers to bear the burden of covering the accommodated workers' shifts. In *Cutter v. Wilkinson* (2005) — a case interpreting the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (legislation similar to RFRA) — the Court reaffirmed this prohibition on forcing third parties to bear the burden or cost of someone else's religious choices. Thus, in addition to being arguably unfair to hire employees without regard to their religion and then impose on them the consequences of the religious compunction of the employer, it also may violate the First Amendment's ban on the establishment of religion.

As the leader of the broad coalition that urged passage of RFRA, the BJC has a special stake in preserving its continued vitality. This means not only making sure the act is applied in ways that both protect the rights of religious claimants and fairly treat third parties who are detrimentally affected; it also impels us to stand against broad-brushed constitutional challenges to RFRA's very foundations and be wary of ways in which it might violate the Establishment Clause as applied in a given case.

Search continues for State Department's next religious freedom ambassador

It's been four months since the Rev. Suzan Johnson Cook resigned as the State Department's religious freedom watchdog, and those who decry religious persecution in Syria, Sudan and elsewhere are wondering how long it's going to take the White House to name a new ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom.

Many in the field hope it's someone with more diplomatic background than Johnson Cook, a former Clinton administration official and popular Baptist minister whose international experience was mostly acquired on the job.

The other factor raising concerns is the more than two years it took for the Obama administration to choose Johnson Cook and to get her confirmed by the Senate.

"A continued vacancy will confirm the suspicion that already exists among foreign governments, persecutors, victims and American diplomats that the issue is not a priority," said Thomas Farr, professor of religion and international affairs at Georgetown University.

On Feb. 6 at the National Prayer Breakfast, President Barack Obama said he looks forward to nominating the next ambassador-at-large for religious freedom, noting that the individual will help lead efforts to stand for "the rights of all people to practice their faiths in peace and in freedom" around the world.

The White House has been tight-lipped about the timeline for a decision, as well as about any candidates it may be considering for the position, which Congress created in 1998

to highlight and alleviate religious persecution worldwide.

Religion News Service compiled a short list of possible candidates for the position, based on conversations with experts who work in the field. Names that surfaced included Chris Seiple, president of the Institute for Global Engagement; Katrina Lantos Swett, vice chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and president of the Lantos Foundation for Human Rights & Justice; Tad Stahnke, attorney and director of policy and programs at Human Rights First; Evelyn Aswad, professor of international law at the University of Oklahoma; and Kurt Donnelly, a political adviser to the U.S. Mission to NATO serving in Brussels.

The ambassador-at-large position does not report directly to Secretary of State John Kerry, as do other ambassadors-at-large, further evidence to those who argue that the State Department needs to take the plight of the religiously oppressed more seriously.

But the appointment of Shaun Casey has helped quell some of that criticism. Kerry tapped Casey, a professor of Christian ethics at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, to head a new Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives within the State Department in August 2013. He reports directly to Kerry, and in many circles is seen as having more influence than Johnson Cook or anyone who would succeed her.

—Religion News Service
with BJC Staff Reports

Church support of the Baptist Joint Committee

The Baptist Joint Committee is grateful for the 236 churches who partnered with us in 2013 to advance our mission.

Churches not only provide financial support to the BJC, but they are also the key avenue for educating people about religious liberty and the separation of church and state. We enjoy and appreciate the close connections we have to the communities of Christians that worship and serve in the historic Baptist tradition.

These churches contributed \$1,000 or more to the BJC Annual Fund in 2013, totaling nearly \$100,000 in support:

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If your church is interested in joining these churches in supporting the BJC, please contact Taryn Deaton, director of development, at tdeaton@BJCOnline.org or 202-544-4226.

A conversation with 2014 Shurden Lecturer Michael I. Meyerson



Meyerson

On April 1-2, Michael I. Meyerson will deliver the 9th annual Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. A professor of law and Piper & Marbury Faculty Fellow at the University of Baltimore, Meyerson is a leading expert in constitutional law and American legal history. His books include *Endowed by Our Creator:*

The Birth of Religious Freedom in America and *Liberty's Blueprint: How Madison and Hamilton Wrote The Federalist Papers, Defined the Constitution, and Made Democracy Safe for the World*. His website, MichaelMeyerson.com, has more on his work and career.

As he prepares for the upcoming lectures, Meyerson took time to preview this year's event and discuss the state of religious liberty.

Why have you dedicated your career to constitutional law and First Amendment issues?

I think the promise of America is so great, and in order for this promise to be fulfilled, we must understand the history of, and reasons for, our fundamental freedoms. We need this knowledge both so we can realize our own potential and respect the desires of others to do the same.

What is your take on the current state of religious liberty in America?

The state of religious liberty here is surprisingly strong. Most of our battles about religion are on the edges, rather than the heart, of religious liberty. The government is not locking up religious minorities and atheists and it is not imposing or even encouraging a particular creed or practice. It's not that the questions we face at this moment are not serious. Rather, my point is that if you contrast America with many other countries, you realize that the vast majority of Americans really do agree on the fundamentals of religious freedom.

What do you see as the greatest threat to religious liberty in the United States today?

In my opinion, the greatest threat to religious liberty is the seeming inability of the opposing sides in the debate on religious freedom to respect the opinions and values of the others. The worst thing would be for either side to prevail without appreciating the wisdom of those with whom they disagree.

Why is understanding the history of the First Amendment and the separation of church and state so important?

In part, it's because we should understand that religious freedom is part of the American legacy. Those who founded our constitutional system appreciated the concept of liberty of conscience better than many nations do today. The Framers, including George Washington, also understood that in order for there to be true freedom of religion, the government needs to play only a very limited and carefully non-denominational role, and to ensure that every single person's rights are fully protected.

What drew you to the Shurden Lectures?

The Shurden Lectures are one of the most important sources for discussion of issues of religious freedom in America today. I am flattered that I was invited to continue the tradition of exploring this most critical and controversial question with honesty and respect for opposing viewpoints.

What do you want the audience to take away from your presentations?

I want people to learn that the Framers understood that religion could be a source of both incredible good and unspeakable evil. It could either divide or unite a society. I hope people realize that the balance the Framers strove to reach is remarkably similar to that which we are striving for today.

2014 Shurden Lectures

Baylor University in Waco, Texas
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April 1 at 11 a.m.

J. Brent Walker preaches in the worship service at the Paul W. Powell Chapel at Truett Theological Seminary

April 1 at 3:30 p.m.

Lecture 1: **The False Divide: Religious Support for Separation of Church and State**

Draper Academic Building, Room 172

Hosted by the Baylor University Department of Religion

April 2 at 2:15 p.m.

Lecture 2: **Freedom of Religion: The Framers' Extraordinary Compromise**

Sheila and Walter Umphrey Law Center, Room 122

Hosted by Baylor Law School

For more information, visit
www.BJConline.org/lectures



K. Hollyn Hollman
General Counsel

Hollman REPORT

Chaplains educate lawmakers on religious freedom in the military

“[T]here is a long and strong history of protecting religious freedom in the military, and specifically of providing chaplains as a means to taking care of the spiritual needs of those who serve.”

Despite suggestions from some members of Congress of religious freedom strains in the military, a recent congressional hearing failed to reveal significant problems. Instead, reports from the chiefs of chaplains and other witnesses provided an affirmation of how properly trained military chaplains reflect the best of our country’s religious freedom tradition and serve that interest in a uniquely challenging environment. The hearings also demonstrated a nagging political instinct by some to misconstrue the nature of religious freedom and exaggerate conflict.

The hearing, held by the Armed Service Committee of the House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Military Personnel, was organized “to examine religious accommodations in the armed services” and follows debate about whether current law and policy are sufficient. Much of the debate has focused on the rights of chaplains from religious traditions that oppose allowing gays to serve openly in the military.

Chaplains occupy a special place in the military, serving as representatives of particular religious traditions who are required to provide for the religious needs of all service members. Subcommittee Chairman Joe Wilson, R-S.C., noted the longstanding tradition of supporting religious freedom in the military and the vital role of chaplains. Rep. Susan Davis, D-Calif., noted the importance of chaplains supporting all those in uniform and their families regardless of their specific beliefs. Rep. Brad Wenstrup, R-Ohio, recalled his personal experience in Iraq that his chaplain “was able to provide compassion and comfort for anyone who was in need, even if they were non-believers of any type.”

The Rev. James B. Magness, a former Navy command chaplain and current Bishop for the Armed Forces and Federal Ministries for the Episcopal Church, where he works with all Episcopal chaplains in the Armed Forces, explained the role of professional chaplains. He noted that in his own tradition, baptismal vows include a commitment to respect the dignity of every human being, which he said parallels the role of military chaplains. “This is a matter of education and training,” Magness said. “We train chaplains ... to be able to understand, and learn, and read situations, to know the distinctions between a religious service and a command function; and to know that in certain settings, certain things are appropriate, and [in] other settings, they’re not.”

Witnesses acknowledged that religious liberty could be harmed by improper censorship or reli-

gious coercion in command settings but disclaimed a problem with either. While witnesses gave clear testimony demonstrating the high regard for religious liberty and professionalism required for effective chaplaincy, some members of Congress seemed intent on undercutting them. Some lawmakers alleged an increase in problems focusing on random acts of noncompliance — which all of the witnesses rejected as outside the bounds of appropriate protocol, and some of which had already been resolved. Other members of Congress focused on the rights of chaplains to pray according to their beliefs as a major concern.

As the witnesses’ testimony uniformly reflected, though, most chaplains do not view their military service through this lens, recognizing that they function differently than do their civilian counterparts and sometimes must put the spiritual needs of service members — including those of different or no faiths — ahead of their own. Magness said that while no policy should prohibit chaplains from praying in any particular way, chaplains have a duty to remain “mindful that they have an effect, as a command leader, upon the dignity of everyone who’s there with them.”

Magness also shared a “meaningful lesson” from his first active duty assignment as a chaplain. In a retirement ceremony for a Navy captain, Magness closed a prayer with the words, “Through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Afterward, the retiring officer approached Magness to thank him for participating but also to respectfully inform Magness that the officer and his family were practicing Jews. “It didn’t take me long to realize that I had just excluded and offended the honoree and all the members of his family by offering an inappropriate prayer. I learned that when in uniform, my responsibility is to care for all of those who are present, not just those of my own faith tradition, for all people, Christian, Jew, Muslim, non-theist, straight, gay or lesbian, all people.”

Such testimony reflects the delicate balance that military chaplains face: while they serve as endorsed representatives of a particular faith tradition, they also have spiritual responsibilities that extend far beyond a single congregation or creed. Fortunately, there is a long and strong history of protecting religious freedom in the military, and specifically of providing chaplains as a means to taking care of the spiritual needs of those who serve. The military deserves our continuing support for those efforts and our vigilance against those who would undermine it.

Obama administration appeals clergy tax ruling

The Justice Department has appealed a federal court ruling that said an IRS tax exemption allowing clergy to avoid paying taxes on a part of their income designated as a housing allowance violates the constitutionally mandated separation of church and state.

The department filed a notice of appeal with the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Chicago on Jan. 24.

Last November, Senior United States District Judge Barbara Crabb said a section of the tax code granting a benefit for “ministers of the gospel” not available to everyone else favors religion over non-religion, thus creating an establishment of religion prohibited by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

But Crabb, of the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Wisconsin, stayed her decision pending appeals, leaving the law intact in that state for the time being.

If the 7th Circuit affirms Crabb’s ruling, it would affect only Wisconsin, Illinois and Indiana, but might prompt the Internal Revenue Service to apply the ruling nationally to ensure consistent tax treatment of ministers.

If the appellate court overturns the ruling, the Freedom From Religion Foundation, which filed the suit, could petition the Supreme Court for review.

—Robert Dilday, *Associated Baptist Press*
with BJC Staff Reports

Tennessee mosque opponents send appeal to U.S. Supreme Court

A group of citizens who sued their county over plans to build a mosque in their community are seeking review by the U.S. Supreme Court, *The Daily News Journal* in Murfreesboro, Tenn., reported Jan. 30.

The appeal challenges a May 2013 ruling by the Tennessee Court of Appeals in Nashville that the Rutherford County planning commission acted properly under Tennessee’s Open Meetings Act prior to approving May 24, 2010, plans for a megachurch-like mosque campus to replace outgrown facilities of the Islamic Center of Murfreesboro (ICM) in which the community’s Muslim residents had been meeting for worship for about 30 years.

It also asks the High Court to test boundaries of the Religious Land Use And Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA), a law passed by Congress in 2000 that protects the religious exercise of persons confined to prison and bans the government from regulating land use in “a manner that imposes a substantial burden on the religious exercise” of a person or congregation without a “compelling governmental interest” that is furthered by “the least restrictive means.” The Baptist Joint Committee led a diverse coalition of religious and civil liberties groups in supporting RLUIPA, and a unanimous Congress enacted the measure.

While the law applies to “religious exercise,” Joe Brandon, the plaintiffs’ attorney, argues that non-religious issues raise national security issues that warrant heightened scrutiny. He offered the example of an ICM board

member who posted approving photos of members of Hamas designated as terrorists by the U.S. Treasury Department in 2003.

“RLUIPA is limited to site activities in furtherance of a ‘religious exercise’ and does not extend to ‘non-religious’ uses that would include affiliations, support or promotion of Muslim Brotherhood, Sharia practices in violation of law and/or Jihad leading to terrorism,” the petition for hearing argues.

U.S. Rep. Scott DesJarlais, R-Tenn., took to Facebook to tell constituents that he had concerns about the role the Tennessee Religious Freedom Act, passed by the state General Assembly in 2009, may have played in the mosque recently gaining approval to have a cemetery.

“There is a difference between legislation that would protect our religious freedoms and legislation that would allow for the circumvention of laws that other organizations comply with on a daily basis,” DesJarlais said.

—Bob Allen, *Associated Baptist Press*
with BJC Staff Reports

Satanists release design for proposed Oklahoma State Capitol monument

The New York-based Satanic Temple prematurely released design plans for a Satanist monument it hopes to place on the Oklahoma State Capitol grounds.

Temple spokesman Lucien Greaves said he mistakenly sent the plans to the Oklahoma Capitol Preservation Commission via email, triggering their disclosure on news and social networking sites via a press release on Jan. 6.

The group wants to erect the monument next to a depiction of the Ten Commandments that has been on the state grounds since 2012. Legislators opened the door to such displays when they pushed through a bill in 2009 giving permission for the Ten Commandments monument, which was paid for with private funds.

The plans show a 7-foot-tall statue of a seated Satan flanked by two children. The design includes two important Satanist symbols: the pentacle, located above Satan’s head, and the baphomet. Greaves said the goat-headed baphomet is believed to be a symbol of idolatry that the Knights Templar were accused of worshipping, and it is now part of disparate occult and mystical traditions.

“The symbol is now a constitutionally protected one that stands for the rights of heretics, for tolerance and free inquiry, and for the unjustly outcast,” Greaves said.

Final plans are not complete yet, but Greaves said the back slab would “almost certainly be granite,” and the sculpture itself would be an as-yet-undetermined metal.

The commission has no deadline for approving or rejecting the application, and the panel imposed a moratorium on new displays in December after receiving a Hindu group’s application for a monument.

“I’m sure the attorneys will decide the legality of the moratorium,” Greaves said, “but as long as the Ten Commandments monument remains on the Capitol grounds, we believe we have legal standing, and there is no reason for the commission not to consider our application.”

—Greg Horton, *Religion News Service*



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REPORT

from the Capital

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WHY WE GIVE

‘We believe that monthly giving helps staff to better develop their long-range work plans.’

Strong Baptist roots and work in public education led G.J. and Kay Tarazi to the Baptist Joint Committee. “As retired public educators, we have repeatedly heard the fallacy that ‘God has been thrown out of our schools.’ We knew better. But simply and accurately explaining the relationship between our democratic government, our diverse and multicultural population, and the role of religion in our society was often challenging,” they said.



The Tarazis began relying on the BJC to help them in their professional lives. “The BJC’s legal and biblical foundation for this necessary separation between government and religion resonates with us,” they said. “In addition, the BJC protects the intended separation found in our Constitution’s First Amendment, and their literature explains it well.”

The Tarazis’ relationship with the BJC dates back to when former executive director James Dunn served as interim pastor at Ravensworth Bap-

tist Church in Annandale, Va. “We have also been very fortunate to have BJC staff as members of our church. In addition, a number of BJC interns have served as youth leaders at Ravensworth. We have been blessed by this wonderful relationship throughout the years,” they said.

Consistent Annual Fund donors for many years, the Tarazis recently became monthly donors. “We chose to be monthly donors to ensure that the BJC has a more steady and reliable cash flow,” they said. “We believe that monthly giving helps staff to better develop their long-range work plans. In addition, it’s simple to set up, and it makes our giving so much easier. It’s a win-win situation as far as we’re concerned.”

Make a lasting investment in religious liberty by becoming a monthly donor today. Visit BJCOnline.org/donate to set up your gift or contact Development Director Taryn Deaton at tdeaton@BJCOnline.org or 202-544-4226 for assistance.