

1101 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE, Washington, DC 20003 phone 202-558-4553 fax 866-714-6762 http://www.VeteransForCommonSense.org

May 24, 2005

# **RE: Oppose the Flag Desecration Constitutional Amendment**

Dear Representative:

We, the undersigned members of Veterans for Common Sense, write to urge you to oppose H.J. Res. 10, the proposed constitutional amendment to prohibit "desecration" of the flag. This proposed amendment is an attack on liberty, and a disturbing distraction from the real concerns of our nation's veterans.

Veterans for Common Sense (VCS) was founded on the principle that in an age when the majority of public servants have never served in uniform, the perspective of war veterans must play a key role in the public debate over national security issues in order to preserve the liberty veterans have fought and died to protect. VCS was formed in 2002 by war veterans who believe that we, the people of the United States of America, are most secure when our country is strong and responsibly engaged with the world. Three years later, our organization has over 12,000 members throughout the United States. Central to our mission is supporting United States servicemen and women, veterans and their families, and preserving American civil liberties as guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution and its amendments.

The United States is faced with a number of pressing concerns related to national security and the quality of life of veterans. We believe that the United States government and military has a responsibility to maintain and continue its work in Iraq so that the country comes out of this war as a stable, secure and sovereign nation where its people have the best opportunity for a decent and free life. The government also has a responsibility to ensure that United States servicemen and women come home safe.

Out of the 360,000 discharged veterans from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, nearly one in four have already visited the Veterans Administration for physical injuries or mental health counseling. Our government has a duty and a responsibility to address both the traditional and non-traditional effects of war, including battlefield injuries, post-traumatic stress, and diseases resulting from vaccines and toxic exposures.

These concerns should be on the top of the congressional agenda this session. But instead of devoting its time and resources to resolving these urgent challenges, Congress apparently chooses to consider amending the Constitution to prohibit a form of nonviolent expression. We are dismayed by this choice.

We urge Congress to preserve American civil liberties as guaranteed in the United States Constitution and its amendments. When it comes to the measure under consideration, we believe that the supposed threat of a few incidents of flag burning does not justify the first ever amendment to the First Amendment. The ability to express nonviolent dissent to government policy is central to the American way of life, and we are loathe to amend away this fundamental liberty.

As veterans, we are indeed offended by those who burn or defile the flag. The flag is a cherished symbol of the freedoms we fought to defend, and we honor it as such. But we must not attempt to protect this symbol at a cost to the freedoms it represents. The Constitution of the United States has never been successfully amended to restrict liberty. To do so now would betray the promise and ideal of America.



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The proposed constitutional amendment to ban "desecration" of the flag threatens the civil liberties of Americans. Further, it distracts from the real world concerns of our active duty military personnel and veterans. Congress should not be in the business of undermining freedom of speech. During this time of war, we urge you to put this unnecessary and dangerous constitutional amendment aside, and instead focus on protecting our national security, insuring our servicemembers in harm's way have what they need to accomplish the mission, and that when they return home they get the best possible care. Again, please oppose H.J. Res. 10. If passed, it will undermine the Constitution that we swore to support and defend.

Sincerely,

BRIGADIER GENERAL (RET.) EVELYN FOOTE, ARMY, ACCOKEEK, MD \* COLONEL DIANE KISTNER, AIR FORCE, CARLTON, GA \* COLONEL COL. & MRS. JAMES P. GRAVES, USAR, RETIRED, ARMY, MARYVILLE, TN \* COLONEL RUSSELL JORDAN JR., ARMY, SARASOTA, FL \* COLONEL JOHN SINER, ARMY, BLOOMINGTON, IN \* COLONEL NICHOLAS SZASZ, ARMY, DEWITT, MI \* LIEUTENANT COLONEL PRESTON COLLINS, AIR FORCE, SATELLITE BEACH, FL \* LIEUTENANT COLONEL ALLAN HASTINGS, AIR FORCE, WARNER ROBINS, GA \* LIEUTENANT COLONEL ROGER HELBIG, AIR FORCE RESERVE, RICHMOND, CA \* LIEUTENANT COLONEL DAVID GINSBERG, ARMY, ANN ARBOR, MI \* LIEUTENANT COLONEL DONNA LIGHTFOOT, ARMY, AUSTIN, AR \* LIEUTENANT COLONEL CHARLES MARTIN, ARMY, HENSLEY, AR \* LIEUTENANT COLONEL GRETCHEN VANEK, ARMY, POCATELLO, ID \* LIEUTENANT COLONEL BARCLAY HASTINGS, MARINE CORPS, COLUMBUS, OH \* LIEUTENANT COLONEL ELIZABETH MCGILLICUDDY, USMC, LOCUST GROVE, VA \* LIEUTENANT COMMANDER PHIL SCHOGGEN, NAVAL RESERVE, NASHVILLE, TN \* LIEUTENANT COMMANDER JOHN BRENNAN, NAVY, WEED, CA \* LIEUTENANT COMMANDER MARK BRYANT, NAVY, OZAWKIE, KS \* LIEUTENANT COMMANDER JAMES F. DARGON, NAVY, WAREHAM, MA \* LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HENRY KIELAROWSKI, PHD, NAVY, SAN FRANCISCO, CA \* LIEUTENANT COMMANDER MILTON LEAKE, NAVY, YORK, PA \* LIEUTENANT COMMANDER ROBERT MEINTZER, NAVY, TUSCALOOSA, AL \* LIEUTENANT COMMANDER JOHN SIMANTON, NAVY, SPOKANE, WA \* MAJOR MARK S HEBERLEIN, DO, AIR FORCE, VIROQUA, WI \* MAJOR ARTHUR JUDGE, AIR FORCE, NEWTON HIGHLANDS, MA \* MAJOR SAMUEL SCHARFF, AIR FORCE, SEATTLE, WA \* MAJOR JAMES STRADER, AIR FORCE, TUCSON, AZ \* MAJOR DR. EUGENE D. BETIT, ARMY, ARLINGTON, VA \* MAJOR ARTHUR DRONZKOWSKI, ARMY, STERLING HEIGHTS, MI \* MAJOR GERALD FISHER, ARMY, BLUFFTON, IN \* MAJOR SAM GOULD, ARMY, LOS ANGELES, CA \* MAJOR DOUGLAS KINNEY, ARMY, OTEGO, NY \* MAJOR RICHARD KROENING, ARMY, RENO, NV \* MAJOR PAUL NAYLOR, ARMY, DURHAM, NC \* MAJOR BURNET OLIVEROS, ARMY, HOUSTON, TX \* MAJOR TOM TREADWAY, ARMY, ABITA SPRINGS, LA \* MAJOR JAMES VAN OOT, ARMY, WEST GROVE, PA \* MAJOR NANCY BELL, MARINE CORPS, LADY LAKE, FL \* MAJOR JEFFREY HALLIN, USMC, SANTA ANA, CA \* COMMANDER DAVID BAILEY, COAST GUARD, SEQUIM, WA \* COMMANDER TOM ATCHISON, NAVY, RICHFIELD, MN \* COMMANDER TED BAHN, NAVY, ANNA MARIA, FL \* COMMANDER THEODORE A. CURTIN, NAVY, PLYMOUTH, MA \* COMMANDER BRUCE GENEREUX, NAVY, VERO BEACH, FL \* COMMANDER RICHARD GROSSCUP, NAVY, EUGENE, OR \* COMMANDER JOHN KASO, NAVY, ALAMEDA, CA \* COMMANDER A. GEORGE MERTZ, NAVY, PORTLAND, ME \* COMMANDER ROBERT WOOD, NAVY, SHAKER HEIGHTS, OH \* CAPTAIN PETER FOLTZ, NAVY, HERSHEY, PA \* CAPTAIN CHUCK ROSCIAM, NAVY, JACKSONVILLE, FL \* CAPTAIN ANDREW SCHOERKE, NAVY, SHAFTSBURY, VT \* CAPTAIN ERIC MORTON, USMC, CARLSBAD, CA \* CAPTAIN HUGH ANDERSON, AIR FORCE, KALAMAZOO, MI \* CAPTAIN NEAL BOWYER, AIR FORCE, HURST, TX \* CAPTAIN HERBERT COURSEN, AIR FORCE, BRUNSWICK, ME \* CAPTAIN KARL FREDERICK, AIR FORCE, SEBASTOPOL, CA \* CAPTAIN TIMOTHY HEBERLING, AIR FORCE, LEESBURG, VA \* CAPTAIN CLAYTON HUBBS, AIR FORCE, AMHERST, MA \* CAPTAIN JACK KELLY, AIR FORCE, ALBUQUERQUE, NM \* CAPTAIN LANDON KIMBROUGH, AIR FORCE, PORT TOWNSEND, WA \* CAPTAIN DAVID LENERS, AIR FORCE, DEWITT, IA \* CAPTAIN ESTHER MASSIMINI, AIR FORCE, PHOENIX, AZ \* CAPTAIN GREGG MATOUS, AIR FORCE, JUPITER, FL \* CAPTAIN JAMES O'HALLORAN, AIR FORCE, SPOKANE, WA \* CAPTAIN STUART B SKADDEN, AIR FORCE, HURLEY, NM \* CAPTAIN BILL SOREM, AIR FORCE,



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