

NU celebrates Constitution Day in its own right

By Grace Davy, Staff

This year's Constitution Day celebration was a great success in every right. Instead of dragging its feet over the federally mandated celebration, Norwich took the opportunity to plan events that got people thinking and talking about provocative topics.

"We could give a quiz, give out an iPod and call it a day, but we are Norwich. We are different," said Criminal Justice Professor Robin Adler, who orchestrated the two day events.

The main event began when the founder of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, Mikey Weinstein, addressed a packed Dole auditorium about problems with religious expression and freedom in the military. The following day pitted NU Political Science Professor Jason Jagemann against History Professor Rowly Brucken in a debate over Atheist and Theist items in the Constitution.

Constitution Day officially kicked off Monday, Sept. 17 in a secured Dole auditorium at 7 p.m. Security was on hand as Weinstein had received a death threat about speaking at Norwich earlier in the day.

"I'm at war," Weinstein began. "Five hours ago we sued the Pentagon because of the Constitution—because the Pentagon was not following the Constitution. We've lost the cherished walls between church and state."

Weinstein filed suit with Spec. Jeremy Hall, a soldier at Fort Riley who was threatened with military charges if he assembled a meeting for Atheists and non-Christians, reported the Associate Press on Sept. 18.

"I've been here about 24 hours...I have been really impressed with Norwich," Weinstein said. "I'm so impressed with this place. I'll go all over the place after this and will tell all that I've announced this lawsuit at Norwich University."

Weinstein brought an impressive resume along with a controversial message. Adler introduced Weinstein as a '77 graduate with honors from the States Air Force Academy, who served ten years as a Judge Advocate General (JAG) officer—or Air Force military attorney, three years in the White House during the Reagan administration managing the Iran-Contra investigation and as general counsel to Ross Perot. He left that position to form the Foundation.

"My fight began with the Mel Gibson movie...as an American, that's my right to not like it," Weinstein said. But when Christian faculty at his alma mater brought to his attention that cadets, including his sons, were "being extorted to see the movie," he decided to take it up with the administration.

"This is not a Christian/Jewish issue," Weinstein said. "I'm just the messenger. The message is the Constitution."

Weinstein cited "737 and 132. Remember those numbers. 737 is the number of military installations; 132 is the number of countries. The Officers Christian Fellowship group is at all these places. [They have] three goals. One: spiritually transform the military; two: ambassadors in Christ in uniform; three: empowered by Holy Spirit."

"If you are evangelized during duty time tell your Equal Opportunity officer, call me or tell that person to 'get out of my face, Sir or Ma'am,'" Weinstein said.

Addressing the cadets and officers in the audience, Weinstein said "you cannot be coerced or pressured to have a 'biblical' name (for yourself). Many of your rights are abridged...as second class citizens you are particularly vulnerable and the government knows that."

He ended his talk by applauding Norwich and those students he met on campus. "Some of the cadets I've met today—I want to watch them. I want to watch this school," he said. "Norwich reminds me so much of what I know so well [coming from the United States Air



Photo by Jay Ericson
Sullivan Museum and History Center staff preparing American flag for exhibit

Force Academy]. It's so much like that but also so very different. My own alma mater wouldn't have me back unless I agreed to debate Pat Robertson's lawyer—head of ACLJ (American Center for Law and Justice) so I want to give you guys a hand.”

The Theist and Atheist debate over the Constitution, the final event celebrating Constitution Day, took place on Tuesday, Sept. 18 at 1 p.m. in Plumley Armory with Jagemann and Brucken giving some background on the first clause and history of the Constitution.

Jagemann took the Atheist view while Brucken debated with the Theist view. Brucken made clear that they were debating from a point of view, not their own personal beliefs.

They began the debate discussing whether or not the Founding Fathers' intended to include God into the governance of the USA. Was the Constitution founded on Christianity or morality?

Brucken argued that the founders “universally believed a republic demanded education and moral citizenry.” They didn't want federal government setting up a national church so they left it up to state, he noted.

He cited a list of examples including “six states (that) had official churches open to all” and seven who “said their politicians must believe in fundamental Christian beliefs. This was a religious group of individuals who looked to their faith to guide morality of our laws. A republic demands citizenry where people possess strong moral code...all religions I know of teach these basic precepts.”

Jagemann pointed to a “recognized framework sought to separate government operations from claim.” The Founders “wanted to divide politics from the Constitution to make sound public policy.

“There is no mention of God. (The) federalist papers mention God twice where James Madison gives it in a ‘heaven only knows’ frame,” he said.

The Declaration of Independence has two mentions, Jagemann noted. One benign like Madison's and the famous “...that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights” line.

Jagemann pointed to other famous references to God and noted that they are recent inclusions. “‘In God We Trust’ came during the Civil War; ‘God’ in the ‘Pledge of Allegiance’ was added in 1954 during McCarthy hysteria.

“The Founding Fathers are really not religious men,” Jagemann said. They kept things straightforward out of skepticism of Puritan (beliefs) and because of the “‘pious presumption of religious rulers,’” he said.

The debate ended successfully when students lined up at the mic to enter the discussion and bounce questions off the two professors.

Constitution Day too, was a success, with students, faculty and staff walking around campus updating each other on an event they may have missed and engaging in discussion.