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As "In God We Trust" is imposed in public arenas, we must ask if national religious mottos should be enforced by government.



"In God We Trust" Now Required in Every Public School Class in Louisiana

In the state of Louisiana, HB8 has expanded a previous law and is calling for displaying "In God We Trust" in every Louisiana public school classroom and postsecondary institutions. The bill passed 98-4.

While concerns were raised about "walking right to the edge of separation of church and state," they were countered by representatives who said it was merely displaying the national motto, not preaching a certain religion.

HB8 doesn't require public funding for the displays. Proponents are hoping to rely on fundraising drives or gifting.

It is likely that HB8 is one of many efforts spawned by the Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation (CPCF). The Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation, Inc., was established later in 2005 to work alongside the members of the Congressional Prayer Caucus in order to build a network of like-minded government leaders who are commit-

ted to prayer and action.

Before the start of COVID-19, the CPCF began a nationwide effort to get "In God We Trust" back in public areas. At that time they even had a 182-page handbook on how to lobby the government to do this on their website. That has since been removed, and they are carefully scrutinizing anyone who requests a copy. The Southern Union Office of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty requested one, but was not responded to.

"In God We Trust" is ... our country's foundation and part of our identity as Americans," says the CPCF, continuing, "In a culture with growing opposition against faith, like-minded citizens are uniting together under one banner and with a strong voice."

"From curriculum debates to the posting of "In God We Trust," we're seeing the political ideology of Christian nationalism impacting religious freedom in our

Please turn to page 2...

Oklahoma Approves Religious Charter School, ACLU Sues

State officials in Oklahoma have approved St. Isidore of Seville Catholic Virtual School as a charter public school. The ACLU is suing because of this encroachment on the separation of church and state.

Oklahoma's public school system requires that all public schools remain open to all students — regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, religion, LGBTQ status, disability, or any other characteristic — and teach a non-religious curriculum. When the State-wide Virtual Charter School Board approved St. Isidore's application, they have now allowed it to receive taxpayer funds and operate as a government entity.

St. Isidore's application

states clearly that the school will be managed by the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, and that it intends to forward "the evangelizing mission of the Church," teaching Catholic doctrine. They have also made it clear that students may be denied admission based on religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other failures to comply with Catholic doctrine. And, they will follow their faith guidelines in employment, which would be considered discrimination in the public sector.

The ACLU lawsuit has been joined by Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the Education Law Center, and the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

A new Catholic charter school will now receive taxpayer funds and operate as a government entity.

In God We Trust, cont...

public schools," says the Baptist Joint Commission (BJC) Center for Faith, Justice, and Reconciliation.

Lawmakers who oppose the motto in classrooms are taken to task. In Minnesota, state Senator John Marty was attacked by conservative media as being "anti-Christian" for opposing an "In God We Trust" bill.

Baptist historian Bill Leonard notes this on the BJC site: "I would ask several questions of the "In God We Trust" movement. Is this less an effort to promote religious liberty than a direct

attempt to mandate a subtle but dangerous Nuevo Religious Establishment in the public square? Should national religious mottos be government enforced?"

"When promoting the national motto from a patriotic stance, there is nothing wrong with this type of 'civil religion,' but when used by groups who wish to promote their own religious views by using the power of the government to control or promote its own interest, to the exclusion of others' interest, the line is crossed from patriotism to national-

ism. Adventists still believe that the enlistment of state coercion in the cause of the church is a fundamental failing of Christian history — one that will lead to the final rebellion in human history against God's non-coercive government," says Amireh Al-Haddad, Southern Union director of religious liberty.

Other states which have or are considering "In God We Trust" in their public schools include Texas, South Dakota, Indiana, Tennessee, North Carolina, Minnesota, Arkansas, Florida, Mississippi, Utah, and Virginia.

- *A federal appeals court has upheld a faith-based school's freedom to choose its administrators and teachers. In **Fitzgerald v. Roncalli High School and Archdiocese of Indianapolis**, a guidance co-director at a Catholic School was not renewed for employment after entering a same-sex union, and went on to sue the school. The court dismissed her case, ruling that the Constitution forbids government from interfering with a religious school's selection of employees. "Today's ruling is common-sense: decisions about who conveys the Catholic faith to Catholic school children are for the Church, not the government," said Joseph Davis, counsel at the defending Becket religious liberty foundation.*

- *In California a group of Jewish parents and schools are fighting in federal court to protect children with disabilities. California law excludes religious schools from receiving special education funding serving children with disabilities. The parents in **Loffman v. California Department of Education** say that their faith compels them to send their children to Orthodox Jewish schools. Two of those schools wish to welcome children with disabilities, but state special education funding is blocked.*

California Hindu Americans Affected by State Ban Against Caste Discrimination

Though now residents of the United States, many Indian immigrants still face being considered "untouchable" in their new home due to being part of that caste in India. Based on birth and descent, caste status can cause discrimination at work, in places of worship, and while shopping amongst others also in the caste system.

Currently, a bill in the California legislature adds caste to its nondiscrimination laws. Senate Bill 403 would make caste a legally protected category in the Unruh Civil Rights Act, California Fair Employment and Housing Act, and state anti-discrimination policies in public schools. While the city of Seattle has already passed such a law, Califor-

California bill may make caste discrimination — whether against high or low caste — illegal.

nia would be the first state to do so.

Congregants of the Fresno, California, Ravidassia temple are strongly supporting the bill, and say equality is at the heart of their faith. The 20,000-member community in central

California come from Hindu, indigenous, and Sikh backgrounds. However, the legislation has encountered opposition from other Indian groups; they fear it will lead to discrimination against Hindu Americans and those of Indian descent.

SCOTUS Rules on Website Case

The Supreme Court of the United States ruled in favor of website designer Lorie Smith, saying that the First Amendment prohibits government from making business owners do or say things that contradict their beliefs. Smith said her religious beliefs would not allow her to create websites for same-sex weddings. Colorado had ruled against her, but SCOTUS said she was not guilty of discrimination in 303 Creative v. Elenis.

Smith is willing to design websites for gay customers, just not wedding sites.

Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee for Religious Liberty, said, "The government must allow room for people to disagree on hot-button issues. It's even more important when the person disagreeing has an unpopular view."

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Texas Legislature Approves Public School Chaplains Without Religious Liberty Safeguards

Texas legislature has passed a bill that will allow public schools to hire chaplains for students or accept them as volunteers. Their only requirements will be a criminal history review and having no connection with sex-offender registration.

Several amendments were defeated along the way: that chaplains should have accreditation similar to those who serve in the U.S. military or work in prisons, barring chaplains from

evangelism or attempting to convert students from one religion to another, requiring the consent of parents, and requiring schools to provide chaplains from any Christian denomination or other belief system that was requested by students.

The American Civil Liberties Union has objected to the bill based on it allowing school counselors to be replaced by religious chaplains, and has sent letters to all Texas school districts.

Erin Walter, chaplain and executive director of the Texas Unitarian Universalist Justice Ministry, expressed concern: "I also anticipate that if we have chaplains ... from a particular religious tradition, and we know that a lot of these bills are coming out of Christian nationalism, that those chaplains could inject new problems into the lives of our students ... espousing religious views that may very well not align with students that are there."

**Would you
approve
of other-
faith clergy
having daily
access to
your child
without your
supervision?**