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Legislators point to Commandments about Sabbath observance and God to show context of religion above mere history.



15 States Push for Ten Commandments, Bibles, Prayer in Schools

At least 15 states have introduced legislation to require displaying the Ten Commandments in public school classrooms. Last year Louisiana was the first state to pass such a law, and many other states are attempting to follow their lead. Additionally, bills have been introduced to require prayer, Bible reading, or chaplains in public schools.

The Louisiana law is currently being fought in courts. Because the federal lawsuit says the law violates the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution — “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion” — it will likely end up in the U.S. Supreme Court.

Because of the Judeo-Christian heritage of the Ten Commandments, some legislators are arguing that they are part of history and not purely religious.

The bills are being fought in most states. Measures in Mississippi and Oklahoma died in committee. Bills were not passed in Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota. The governor of Ar-

izona vetoed the bill in her state.

Though primarily conservative states, some Christian lawmakers are not pushing bills through because of the desire to not compromise the Constitution. For example, in Montana, eight Republicans joined every Democrat in the Senate to defeat the measure.

“So, if we put the Ten Commandments up, which are Christian commandments, then we’re actually violating the plain language of our Constitution in our First Amendment,” said Montana state Senator Jason Ellsworth, Republican.

Further, the Oklahoma Supreme Court ruled in March to pause the purchase of Bibles for Oklahoma classrooms, which stops the Oklahoma Department of Education from requesting bids for their purchase for students.

However, bills related to allowing prayer, the 10 Commandments or chaplains in schools have been passed or are still being considered in Kentucky, Texas, and Nebraska.

NEWS OF THE WORLD

Japanese Court Orders Dissolution of Unification Church

A district court in Tokyo, Japan, has revoked the tax-empt status of the Unification Church's Japanese branch, and ordered the group to liquidate its assets. The group claims violation of Article 20 of the Japanese Constitution, and may appeal to higher courts.

The Unification Church is a sect commonly known as the Moonies, and begun by Sun Myung Moon, self-proclaimed messiah, in Seoul, Korea, in 1954. Moon said he'd been sent by Jesus to defeat communism and strengthen families through

marriage ceremonies.

The court decision was rooted in a request from the Ministry of Education, after their investigation of the 2022 assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Though less than 1% of Japan's population, the Unification Church has considerable political influence, and promotes candidates of the Liberal Democratic Party, including the late Prime Minister.

The man charged with Abe's killing blamed the Unification church for bankrupting his family via his

mother's donations, which drove his brother to suicide. Subsequent investigation into the sect found evidence of coerced donations, and current Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has fired or transferred Cabinet members with Unification ties.

Japanese courts have dissolved two previous religious groups: Aum Shinrikyo, the cult which was responsible for the sarin gas attack in 1995; and the Myokakuji temple group, whose leader was convicted of fraud.

Decline of Christianity in U.S. Slowing, Possibly Stabilizing

A recent study by the Pew Research Center indicates that the earlier decline of Christianity in the United States has slowed and may be stabilizing. Surveying nearly 37,000 Americans in 2023 and 2024, Pew found the following: nearly 85% believe in God or a universal spirit and 62% identify as Christian, including 40% as Protestant and 19% as Catholic.

Previous numbers have been declining for years. In 2007, 78% considered themselves Christian, and

only 71% by 2014. And, 29% of Americans previously identified as religiously unaffiliated — including atheists, agnostics, and "nothing in particular."

This could possibly be attributed in part to the aging population, however. Only 46% of adults younger than 25 identify as Christian, while 80% do of those older than 74.

The survey also found 7.1% of the population is in a non-Christian religious group, up from 4.7% in 2007.

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- A suit claiming violation of free exercise, free speech, and the 4th Amendment was filed in a New York federal district court, challenging a practice of the New York Police Department. The NYPD will forcibly remove the hijabs of Muslim women, in public, as a method of crowd control during demonstrations.

- Brian Burch, president of CatholicVote, has been nominated by President Trump as ambassador to the Vatican. CatholicVote, a political advocacy group, endorsed Trump and ran advertisements for him during the presidential campaign. Burch is the author of the book, "A New Catholic Moment: Donald Trump and the Politics of the Common Good."

- The U.S. 6th Circuit Court of Appeals has upheld the decision of an earlier court which penalized Kim Davis, county clerk in Kentucky, who refused a marriage license to a same-sex couple. The 6th Circuit noted that government officials "have private lives and their own constitutional rights." But, public officials engaging in state action cannot assert a 1st Amendment defense. They cannot wield the authority of the state to violate the constitutional rights of citizens.

U.S. Report Recommends Designating Countries Restricting Religious Freedom

An annual report by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has been released. It makes recommendations to the State Department for countries to be named as Countries of Particular Concern (CPC), those to place on the Special Watch List (SWL), and others entities to be named Entities of Particular Concern (EPC).

USCIRF 2025

Recommendations:

- CPCs — redesignate 12 countries: Burma, China, Cuba, Eritrea, Iran, Nicaragua, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan.
- CPCs — add four countries: Afghani-

stan, India, Nigeria, and Vietnam.

- SWL — retain status on two countries: Algeria, Azerbaijan.
- SWL — add 10 countries: Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Syria, Turkey, and Uzbekistan.
- EPCs — redesignate seven nonstate actors: al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, the Houthis, Islamic State – Sahel Province, Islamic State in West Africa Province (also referred to as ISIS-West Africa), and Jamaat Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin.

Additionally, the USCIRF recommended that an Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom be designated as soon as

possible. That person would highlight religious freedom concerns and lead global religious freedom initiatives via the U.S. Department of State.

“U.S. support for the right to freedom of religion...must remain a priority as...a strategic national interest and a reflection of our national identity.” ~Annual Report

10 Commandments Returned to Capitol

The ongoing debate over returning a 10 Commandments monument to the Capital grounds in Kentucky ended in late March with House Joint Resolution 15, in which the state legislature ordered the “return for permanent display on the New State Capitol grounds the granite Ten Commandments monument given to the Commonwealth of Kentucky in 1971 by the Fraternal Order of Eagles.”

The U.S. 6th Circuit Court of Appeals rejected its return in 2002 as a violation of the Establishment Clause. However, Kentucky’s new Resolution states that the legal precedent has changed, and since the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear a similar case about New York, the previous ruling “is no longer good law.”

Utah RFRA Protects Sect’s Psilocybin Use

In an unusual case in Utah, a federal district court has said that law enforcement must not interfere with the sincere religious use of psilocybin — a psychedelic compound found in more than 200 species of mushrooms — by members of the religious group Singularism.

The religious use of this agent is protected by Utah’s Religious Freedom Restoration Act, and law enforcement was also ordered to return items which had been taken from the group.

The court found that the Utah Controlled Substances Act (UCSA) “substantially burdened their sincere religious exercise.” Members of this new sect, termed voyagers, consume a sacramental psilocybin tea and embark on a spiritual journey in which they write their own scripture.

Defendants claimed that Singularism is a drug-dealing business hiding behind a religious moniker. In studying the evidence, though, the court was convinced that it is a legitimate religion, and that the plaintiffs were sincere practitioners. Because the plaintiffs were able to establish their sincere religious beliefs, it became the burden of the government to demonstrate that the UCSA was accomplishing “a compelling state interest using the least restrictive means.”

Committing to religious liberty means that protections must be applied equally to unpopular and even strange religious groups — as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was considered before becoming the primary religion in Utah.

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Wyoming Governor Signs RFRA Bill, Georgia's RFRA Passes Senate and House

The Wyoming Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) was recently passed to strengthen religious freedom from state-level rules and regulations. This makes Wyoming the 29th state to enact RFRA protections.

Wyoming's RFRA closely aligns with the 1993 federal RFRA, signed under President Bill Clinton, and prohibits both state and local governments from passing laws that "substantially burden a person's right to the

exercise of religion." The only exceptions to burdening would be if the government's rule was "essential to further a compelling government interest" and "the least restrictive means of furthering that ... interest." Wyoming's legislation was supported by most Republicans and half the Democrats.

In Georgia, a RFRA bill passed in both the Georgia Senate and House. This one, however, garnered

more controversy, because opponents believe it would allow businesses to discriminate against the LGBTQ community.

It is interesting to note that 25 years ago, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act was introduced by a Democrat administration and fought by Republicans. Changes since then have led to RFRA bills being supported by Republicans, but often objected to by Democrats.

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