



Omission of Pledge's 'under God' needed

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CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

For the second time, the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in favor of Sacramento atheist Michael Newdow and his quest to rid public schools of the entire Pledge of Allegiance.

Newdow claims the words "under God" violate the separation of church and state. After the court ruled in favor of Newdow in 2002, the case was taken to the U.S. Supreme Court.

It ruled that Newdow didn't have standing in the case because he was suing on behalf of his daughter, of whom he did not have custody. As a result, the Supreme Court didn't hear the case and it reverted the ruling back to the 9th Circuit.

Last Wednesday, U.S. District Judge Lawrence Karlton ruled – once again –

that the phrase "under God" in the pledge violates the rights of school children to be "free from a coercive requirement to affirm God," as he wrote in his decision. Karlton couldn't be more correct.

Those who claim the words "under God" aren't religious, but are merely patriotic, need to check their history. The words in question were inserted into the pledge during the mid-1950s as a way to distinguish morally upstanding Americans from evil, godless Soviets. The phrase became an ego boost for a fearful nation caught up in the Cold War.

To put this editing of the pledge into a present-day context, it would be like changing the Star Spangled Banner after 9/11 to read, "o'er the land of the free and the home of anti-terrorists." It doesn't sound right and it certainly doesn't sound patriotic. "Under God" is divisive and contentious language that has remained in the pledge for too long.

When viewed in the scope of the Constitution and all previous precedents relating to this case, Newdow is right. Furthermore, he's not merely some wacko from Berkeley as many contend; he's a medical doctor and a lawyer who understands that just because something has seeped into the American subconscious, it doesn't mean it's right.

Because of religion's segregating

nature, it has absolutely no place in schools, federal buildings or the public realm of this great nation. America was founded on the basis of freedom of and freedom *from* religion.

Religions are often like fraternities. You belong to one, believe vigorously in its teachings and look down on those who

believe differently. When even one person feels alienated in a public school, something must change. Newdow is trying to effect this change and is proving, even though his beliefs may be of the minority opinion, they are no less valid.

Many will argue the framers of the Constitution intended to make religion a part of the daily exercises of this country. After all, it was Thomas Jefferson who wrote, "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights." But the framers also knew a secular govern-

ment is the only way to maintain a working democracy. We don't want to become a nation that allows too much God in its government, such as the Afghani Taliban – one of our greatest enemies during the last four years and one of the world's leading theocracies.

Today, our goal as a nation should be progression, not regression. Separating ourselves from the limitations of religion can allow us to move forward. Nations that are steeped in religion often find themselves steeped in controversy, or holy wars.

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Debate over the religious reference in the Pledge of Allegiance began in 2002. KRT Campus

God belongs in His houses: churches, mosques, synagogues and the like – He does not belong in the White House. Sure, the words "under God" seem harmless enough – just two words for school children to recite before their day begins. But they are not just any two words, and if use of them continues we will tumble into a non-secular society that we don't want to be in. Remember the final words of the 9/11 hijackers: *Allah akbar* – God is great.

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History of the Pledge

The origin of the Pledge of Allegiance and how it has been changed:



1982: Written by socialist, Baptist minister France Bellamy, published in Family magazine; first used in public schools on Columbus Day.

1924: For Flag Day, the phrase "the flag of the United States of America" replaces "my flag."

1954: Congress adds "under God" after campaign by Knights of Columbus, other Christian groups.

Original: I pledge allegiance to my flag and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Current: I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands; one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

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