



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on February 9, 2015

Atheist Group Fails Again to Remove “Under God” from the Pledge

The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty [rejoiced](#) over the decision of a New Jersey Superior Court last week to keep the words “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance.

This is the fifth time the Fund has successfully defended against attacks from groups such as the American Humanist Association (AHA) from demanding that the Pledge either be removed from public school classrooms, or that the offending words be removed from the Pledge.



Eric Rassbach, deputy general counsel for the Becket Fund, nolted:

“God” is not a dirty word. The Pledge of Allegiance isn’t a prayer, and reciting it doesn’t magically create an official state religion. The Pledge — in the tradition of Washington’s Farewell Address or Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address — is not a prayer to God but a statement of who we are as a nation. Dissenters have every right to sit out the Pledge, but they can’t silence everyone else.

That’s not exactly what’s at issue, according to Roy Speckhardt, the AHA’s executive director:

It’s not the place of state governments to take a position on god-belief. The current pledge marginalizes atheist and humanist kids as something less than ideal patriots, merely because they don’t believe the nation is under God.

It’s discrimination, the group claims, and that’s unconstitutional under New Jersey’s state constitution. The lawsuit, brought in April 2014 on behalf of an anonymous family (anonymous because, according to the AHA, if their identities were known they would likely suffer “persecution” for their non-beliefs), claims that the Matawan-Aberdeen Regional School District in Monmouth County, New Jersey, by requiring the daily recitation of the pledge, “publicly disparages plaintiffs’ religious beliefs, calls plaintiffs’ patriotism into question, portrays plaintiffs as outsiders and second-class citizens, and forces [the child] to choose between nonparticipation in a patriotic exercise or participation in a patriotic exercise that is invidious to him and his religious class.”

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Not so, wrote Judge David Bauman in his 21-page opinion:

The Pledge of Allegiance ... is not to be viewed, and has never been viewed, as a religious exercise. It is intended, rather, as a vehicle to transmit “unimpaired to succeeding generations” of American public school boys and girls, those core values of duty, honor, pride and fidelity to country on which the social contract between the United States and its citizens is ultimately based. To that end, the Pledge ... undeniably advances a compelling state interest....

This court finds that the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance is a secular, not a religious activity and thus [is] a constitutionally-protected activity. No case stands for the contrary.



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The case made national headlines when a student attending Highland Regional High School in Monmouth County, Samantha Jones, along with her family, joined the American Legion and the Knights of Columbus in their defense against the AHA lawsuit. In a letter published by Fox News, Jones explained:

When I heard about a group of atheists suing to silence every New Jersey school kid who wished to say the Pledge of Allegiance in its entirety, including the words “under God,” I knew I had to do something. That’s why my family and I decided to defend the Pledge....

The judge agreed with us. He dismissed the American Humanist Association’s lawsuit because our legal system doesn’t force kids into silence just because some others take offense at timeless American values.... In New Jersey, as in every other state, reciting the Pledge of Allegiance is entirely optional. No one has to participate. In fact, if a student declines to participate, he or she is even allowed to remain seated — students don’t have to stand up, salute the flag, or say anything....

However, the same laws that protect the atheists’ world view, protect mine. I will not let them silence me. I’ve been reciting the Pledge since preschool, and to me, the phrase “one nation under God” sums up the history and values that made this country great. “Under God” acknowledges that our rights don’t come from the government ... the government cannot be allowed to take away the basic human rights it did not create.

Back in May, in a nearly identical lawsuit brought by the AHA in Massachusetts, Supreme Judicial Court Justice Roderick Ireland agreed with Jones: “For those who have been attacking the pledge, we would offer this: our system protects their right to remain silent, but it doesn’t give them a right to silence others.”

The American Humanist Association, founded in 1941, says that its mission is to advance humanism, “a philosophy of life ... without theism.” It supports the *Humanist Manifesto*, which first appeared in print in 1933, and which states, in part:

The universe is self-existing and not created;

Man is a part of nature and that he has emerged as a result of a continuous process; and

The nature of the universe depicted by modern science makes unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human values.

In other words, humans are “on their own” in a world that makes no earthly sense, and that accordingly, humanists “seek to elicit the possibilities of life” without guidance from above. This world view was resoundingly rejected in a recent poll conducted by LifeWay Research, a Christian polling group, which found that 85 percent of respondents supported keeping “under God” in the pledge, with just eight percent opposed.

Even President Dwight Eisenhower, when he signed the bill adding “under God” to the Pledge on Flag Day in 1954, said:

From this day forward, millions of our school children will daily proclaim in every city and town, every village and rural school house, the dedication of our nation and our people to the Almighty....

In this way we are reaffirming the transcendence of religious faith in America’s heritage and future; in this way we shall constantly strengthen those spiritual weapons which forever will be our country’s most powerful resource.



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With the tide so strongly against the AHA, Rassbach asked rhetorically: “Do we have to keep playing this game? It would be much less divisive for our society if those opposed to the Pledge would stop trying to silence those who disagree with them.”

That’s not likely to happen. The humanist worldview holds that opposing views are flat-out wrong and destructive to the brave new world without God that they are working to build. The battle has simply shifted from claims of freedom of speech under the First Amendment at the national level to claims of discrimination under constitutions at the state level.

The attack on the words “under God” in the Pledge is just a skirmish in the atheists’ and humanists’ long war against God.

A graduate of an Ivy League school and a former investment advisor, Bob is a regular contributor to The New American magazine and blogs frequently at www.LightFromTheRight.com, primarily on economics and politics.



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