



Atheist Group Stops Georgia Coach From Praying with Team

The Coweta County School District in Georgia has issued an edict banning all coaches from participating in student-initiated prayer or other displays of worship while acting in an official capacity. The edict follows after a complaint was filed by the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), a Wisconsin-based atheist group that Townhall observes has an “ugly history of bullying small towns into eradicating any public displays of the Christian faith.”



FFRF obtained a video of East Coweta County High School football coach John Small bowing his head during prayer and used it as evidence in an October 25 letter to the school district.

“It is illegal for public school athletic coaches to lead their teams in prayer,” FFRF attorney Christopher Line wrote in a letter to the school district. “Coach Small’s conduct is unconstitutional because he endorses and promotes his religion when acting in his official capacity as a school district employee.”

Once again, the group is seriously skewing the parameters of the First Amendment, which simply states that Congress should not pass laws establishing a religion or prohibiting the free exercise of religion. Instead, the First Amendment is being used in violation of itself, as Christians are continually being told to refrain from participating in the free exercise of their faith.

The FFRF contends that Coach Small’s behavior could make non-religious students uncomfortable.

“They may realize the coach likes the prayer and he wants the prayer to take place, so I’m going to single myself out if I choose not to participate,” FFRF member Chris Line told Fox 5.

Predictably, the district kowtowed to the demands of the atheists just one day after they filed the complaint.

“Representatives of the school cannot participate in any student-initiated or student-led prayer or other worship while acting in their official capacity,” school board attorney Nathan Lee wrote in a memo obtained by the *Newnan Times-Herald*. “For instance, they cannot join hands, bow their heads, take a knee or commit another act that otherwise manifests approval with the students’ religious experience.”

Coweta School Superintendent Steve Barker met with coaches from three public schools in his district to discuss the specifics of the incident and explain the district’s position on religious activity and school events.

When the school learned that the prayers had been led by a volunteer “community coach,” it determined that the rules applied to him as well, even though he does not receive a paycheck from the school.

“Community coaches would not be any different in my opinion,” Barker said.

But local residents support Small and are disappointed that an outside group has a more powerful



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on November 8, 2017

influence on the school district than they do.

“What kind of leader would you rather have than somebody that would pray for their children, for your children, for all of our children?” Alice Thompson asked in an interview with television station WSB.

“I have my right to pray and everybody else has a right to pray so we’ll stand behind Coach Small and our boys,” one parent told television station WAGA.

Small told the *Times-Herald* that he will adhere to the school’s demands.

“I knew this was an amazing community here in Coweta County when I got here, but what’s amazing is this situation has made this community even stronger and better,” Small said. “We understand there are laws in place and we follow them to the best of our knowledge. Are we perfect? No, but no one is, and we are always learning and trying to be better eah day.”

On October 27, the FFRF issued a press release celebrating its victory titled “FFRF tackles coach-led prayers at Ga. school.”

But FFRF’s victory was a small one, as it did not stop East Coweta athletes from participating in prayer before their November 3 game against Newnan High School. Still, the absence of coaches was noticeable.

FFRF launched a similar battle against Georgia’s Smith’s Station High School in the Lee County School District over the school’s routine of reciting the Lord’s Prayer over the stadium’s loudspeaker before each game. Following a complaint from FFRF, the school was forced to discontinue this practice. But before a September game against Central High School, fans and athletes from both teams recited the Lord’s Prayer loudly from their seats, proving they did not need the loudspeaker.

FFRF has also built a reputation for waging war on Christmas by opposing Nativity scene displays and purchasing anti-Christmas billboards to be displayed in highly public places. With Christmas quickly approaching, it is inevitable this group will find its way in the news cycle again very soon.



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