



Atheists Sue Pennsylvania Lawmakers Over “Year of Bible” Proclamation

The Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) has found its latest target. The national atheist club has filed a federal lawsuit against a Pennsylvania legislator for a resolution, passed earlier this year in the state House of Representatives, that declares 2012 as the “Year of the Bible” in the state. The suit, which argues that the proclamation violates the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause, names the author of the resolution, State Representative Rick Saccone (left), as a defendant, along with the state House’s Parliamentarian, Clancy Myer, and the Chief Clerk of the House, Anthony Frank Barbush.



The suit complains that FFRF’s Pennsylvania members “have had direct and unwanted exposure to the Year of the Bible Resolution and the hostile environment created thereby as a result of the official declaration of a state religion by the Pennsylvania Legislature.” The members, the suit laments, “are made to feel as if they are political outsiders” by the religion-endorsing speech included in H.R.535.

According to the advocates of godlessness, the Bible “contains violent, sexist, and racist models of behavior that FFRF members find personally repugnant, and which potentially could encourage persons who rely on them to act in a manner harmful to them and others.” They also fear that “H.R. 535 sends a message of Christian endorsement and disparagement to nonbelievers.”

The federal complaint states that proclamation “improperly proclaims the Bible to be ‘the word of God,’ as a matter of governmental determination,” when in fact “the Pennsylvania House of Representatives has no such authority or right to determine what is ‘the word of God,’ or if there is a ‘word of God,’ or if there is a ‘God.’ ”

Additionally, the suit complains, H.R. 535 “incorrectly alleges that the Bible has ‘made a unique contribution in shaping the United States.’ ... In fact, the United States was founded not on the Bible, but on a secular and Godless Constitution, which grants sovereignty not to a deity or a ‘holy book,’ but to ‘We the People.’ ”

In the suit the FFRF asks that the defendants be prohibited from ‘further publication and public distribution of H.R. 535,’ and be required to “undertake corrective actions to publicly report the unconstitutionality” of the proclamation. The atheists also demand, among other redresses, an official statement that “the theocratic principles of the Bible do not constitute the official, preferred, or endorsed religion of the State of Pennsylvania,” and that the government of Pennsylvania “is not Judeo-Christian....”

Specifically the proclamation, which was passed by Pennsylvania lawmakers in January, declares that the “Bible, the word of God, has made a unique contribution in shaping the United States as a



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on March 30, 2012

distinctive and blessed nation and people....” The resolution states that “WHEREAS, Renewing our knowledge of and faith in God through holy scripture can strengthen us as a nation and a people; therefore be it ... RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives declare 2012 as the ‘Year of the Bible’ in Pennsylvania in recognition of both the formative influence of the Bible on our Commonwealth and nation and our national need to study and apply the teachings of the holy scriptures.”

FFRF’s official spokesperson, Annie Laurie Gaylor, claimed that her group had received “an outpouring of indignation” over the proclamation. “We’ve never had so many members volunteer to be part of one of our lawsuits.”

[Rep. Saccone defended his resolution](#), saying its unanimous passage in the state House “suggests that although it may not be politically correct to admit, our leaders certainly do recognize the value of God’s word in government. We will all be better off for it.” He said that while the proclamation “recognizes the significant impact the Bible has had on our country,” it does not inhibit those of other faiths or no faith at all. He recalled that “a joint session of Congress passed a similar resolution signed by President Ronald Reagan on Feb. 3, 1983, declaring that year as the Year of the Bible in America.”

Saccone noted the importance some of the most influential of America’s Founding Fathers placed on faith and Scripture. “George Washington himself spoke frequently of the Bible, and in his very first act, emblematic of the office he was about to take, he chose to lay his hand on the Bible to take that oath,” Saccone recalled. “That tradition has been carried on by every President after him, swearing their oath of office on the Bible, frequently choosing, as Washington did, a specific verse within that they believe has special meaning.”

He recalled that Pennsylvania’s most honored state lawmaker, Benjamin Franklin, declared that “a Bible in every home is the principle support of virtue, morality, and civil liberty.” And he noted that Thomas Jefferson, often misidentified by modern historians as an agnostic, declared that “God who gave us life gave us liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God?”

Another of the resolution’s sponsors, State Representative Jerry Stern, told the [Christian Post](#) that the FFRF lawsuit is “frivolous” and without merit, arguing that the Establishment Clause applies only to the federal government. “Our First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is quite clear: ‘Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,’” Stern said. “Our Constitution does not mention a separation principle.”

Diane Gramley of the [American Family Association of Pennsylvania](#) agreed with Stern’s evaluation of the suit, telling [OneNewsNow.com](#): “I don’t think there’s any question that it’s a frivolous lawsuit.” She suggested that FFRF “is trying to rewrite our history when they say that God and the Bible have no place in our founding as a nation. They’re totally wrong.”

She pointed out that the atheist group’s lawsuit is part two of an assault on the state. “They started the billboard campaign against the resolution a couple weeks ago there in the capitol area, and now with this lawsuit,” she said. “They’ve got both too much time and too much money on their hands.”



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