



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on April 20, 2012

Ariz. Law Allows Bible to Be Taught in Public Schools

The course will allow for no proselytizing, but will address “the influence of the Old and the New Testaments on laws, history, government, literature, art, music, customs, morals, values, and culture,” reported the [Arizona Republic](#).

In 1963, the U.S. Supreme Court banned religiously motivated Bible reading in public schools, but allowed that “the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities” as long as it is “presented objectively as part of a secular program of education.”



Republican State Representative Terri Proud, the bill’s sponsor, said such a course is important because students deserve to know about the overwhelming number of biblical references and allusions that pop up in everyday life, and the extent to which Scripture has influenced many aspects of American culture.

“It is everywhere around us, and to say that I don’t want my child exposed to that, then we might as well not have air and breathe because it is implemented into our society,” Proud said of the Bible. She pointed out that similar courses are being taught in public schools across the nation, and said that too many teachers are intimidated into thinking the Bible is off-limits.

The legislation stipulates that a teacher “who instructs a course offered under this section in its appropriate historical context and in good faith shall be immune from civil liability and disciplinary action.”

The bill received abundant support from Christian schools. “The Bible is a historical book, so our students are learning history when they read the Old Testament and the New Testament,” said Darren Johnson of [Phoenix Christian Unified Schools](#).

He added that the number of biblical references in American culture make the importance of Scripture difficult to ignore. “To not teach the Bible in school as a historical book, you really leave a vacuum of knowledge in the areas of literature, history, our government, music, art,” he said.

Predictably, while the bill enjoyed nearly unanimous support from Republican lawmakers, it was largely panned by Democrats. “I specifically oppose this bill due to the part that it is tailored to one religion only,” said Democratic Representative Anna Tovar, a former teacher. She insisted that such materials have no place in the classroom. “In public schools parents have that freedom that there isn’t one religion being pushed on their children,” she said during debate over the bill. “If a parent chooses that religion should be a focus, then they can choose a private school.”

The [Huffington Post](#) noted that the curriculum provided for in the bill “excludes other denominational materials like the Book of Mormon, Jewish and Hindu texts, and the Quran.” But Proud pointed out that, proportionally, such religious literature has had an insignificant influence on the American cultural landscape. “The Quran hasn’t influenced Western culture the way the Bible has,” she told the [Arizona Daily Star](#), adding that students are exposed to other ancient religions and mythology elsewhere in



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school.

Also lining up against the bill were atheist and secular groups such as Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, whose spokesman, Joe Conn, told the [Christian Post](#) that the bill was a disappointment because it “is not about improving academic achievement; it’s about introducing religious indoctrination into the schools and currying favor with conservative religious voters.” He speculated that “most public schools will decide not to offer Bible courses. They are already strapped for funds, so I doubt if they’ll want to use scarce resources to intervene in such a controversial topic.”

But Proud predicted that many school districts will recognize the deep value of biblical knowledge to students preparing for college and beyond. “Many professors from various universities like Harvard and Yale have stated that biblical knowledge is a key factor to a successful education,” she told the [Christian Post](#). “As the U.S. Supreme Court has said: ‘[it] might well be said that one’s education is not complete without a study of comparative religion, or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization.’ ”



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