



N.J. School Compelled to Stop Saying “God Bless America” After ACLU Complaint

Students at Glenview Elementary School in Haddon Heights have followed the Pledge of Allegiance every morning with the phrase “God bless America” since the September 11th attacks. Interference from the American Civil Liberties Union has now put an end to that long-standing tradition.

WCAU-TV reports that the ACLU recently contacted Glenview Elementary to lodge a complaint about students uttering the phrase “God bless America.”



Ed Barocas, legal director for the ACLU of New Jersey, addressed a letter to the school wherein he claims the school’s actions were in violation of the Constitution, [the Courier-Post writes](#).

“The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution prohibits the government from not only favoring one religion over another, but also from promoting religion over non-religion,” he wrote in a letter to the school district’s attorney. “The greatest care must be taken to avoid the appearance of governmental endorsement in schools, especially elementary schools, given the impressionable age of the children under the school’s care and authority.”

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This is a somewhat distorted interpretation of the First Amendment, which reads, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Simply stated, the First Amendment forbids Congress from declaring a national religious denomination. This is the true “interpretation,” though the simple language requires little interpretation, that Americans have subscribed to for 170 years after it was written. James Madison explained that the First Amendment was written because “the people feared one sect might obtain a preeminence ... and establish a religion to which they would compel others to conform.” Nowhere in the Constitution does it claim that there is to be a complete separation of church and state.

But that has not stopped groups such as the ACLU from their anti-religion crusades.

Principal Sam Sassano defended the recitation of the phrase as a patriotic action, not necessarily a religious one. “It never, to us, invoked any type of religious intentions. It was basically a patriotic gesture that the boys and girls were doing,” Sassano told KYW Newsradio. “It wasn’t taught with any intention of having any type of religious overtones,” he said. “It was taught to show patriotism.”

Barocas suggested that the school find an alternate way of showing patriotism. “Parents, not the government, have the right to direct the religious upbringing of their children. If they’re looking for something patriotic there are a number of ways, including the phrase ‘united we stand,’ that can do that, without having the requirement of children as young as kindergarten to make this daily recitation asking for God’s blessing,” Barocas said.

But Sassano asserts that the students were never required to participate in the recitation. “We teach



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on January 6, 2016

the children to be respectful,” he said. “So if they choose not to recite the pledge, they stand quietly. Nothing is forced on the child.”

Sassano sent an e-mail to parents to make them aware of the complaint, wherein he wrote, “A concern has been raised ... that this practice in invoking God’s blessing as a daily ritual is unconstitutional and in violation of the Establishment Clause, since it allegedly promotes religious over non-religious beliefs, especially with young, impressionable children.”

“It has been our view that the practice is fundamentally patriotic in nature and does not invoke or advance any religious message, despite the specific reference to God’s blessing,” he added.

Still, despite his explanation for the ritual, the school has decided to stop their practice of saying “God bless America” after the Pledge of Allegiance.

“We will explore alternative methods for honoring the victims and first responders of the 9/11 tragedy,” he wrote.

Sassano states that the school cannot afford to participate in a lengthy and costly legal battle. “Budgets across the state of New Jersey are very tight,” the principal said. “We have to be very cautious how we spend taxpayer funds. The amount of legal fees to fight something like this in court could really break a budget.”

Sassano adds that he will not prohibit students from deciding on their own to say “God bless America” as he respects the students’ freedom of speech.

But parents at the school are livid and feel that the school bowed too quickly to the demands of the ACLU. On such parent is Christi Clark, who called the ACLU’s actions “typical” and vowed to challenge the civil liberties group on the issue. “They’re bullying the masses. We’re going to stand up and say that we don’t agree,” Clark said.

Clark added that parents are concerned that by kowtowing to the ACLU’s demands, the school has made itself vulnerable to other ACLU whims, such as the Pledge of Allegiance, since it includes the phrase “under God.”

Despite numerous lawsuits challenging the words “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance, however, courts have repeatedly maintained that the Pledge of Allegiance, with the words “under God,” remains constitutional.

Debi Krezel, parent of a sixth-grader, states that she understands why the district opted to forego its morning routine, but that she is disturbed by what it means. “I’m very, very upset about this,” said Krezel. “Being a daughter, a sister, niece and cousin of veterans and first responders — (as well as) an American and a taxpayer — why are my rights and my child’s rights being taken away?”

“I don’t think it’s fair to us or our children,” she told Fox News’ Todd Starnes. “What are they going to take from us next? We are slowly chipping away the values and beliefs and traditions that (the nation) was created upon.”

The *Christian Post* reports that the Yulle High School in Florida had a similar issue in February 2015 over the phrase “God bless America,” which was said during morning announcements. The American Humanist Association wrote a letter of complaint, wherein the group stated that two atheist students at the school had lodged grievances. “Indeed, the daily validation of the religious views of God-believers resigns atheists to second-class citizens. Because attendance is mandatory, the students have no way of avoiding this daily message either,” the complaint read.



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The school responded by stating that the student giving the morning announcements used the phrase on his own accord and has been reprimanded for it.



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