

One nation, under God?

A Godless American government would doom country for failure

Supreme Court should exclude words that don't apply to everyone



MATT MADDOX

In February of 1954, President Dwight D. Eisenhower and members of the Washington press attended a sermon by the Rev. George Docherty on the pledge of allegiance and the Soviets. "Apart from the mention of the phrase 'the United States of America,' it could be the pledge of any republic. In fact, I could hear little Muscovites repeat a similar pledge to their hammer-and-sickle flag in Moscow," Docherty said. Later that year, the words "under God" were added to the pledge of allegiance. This was not a fickle or cosmetic change. It was at the height of the Cold War against atheistic communist forces that were overtaking and oppressing the world. It took that war for America to remember the critical role that God plays in individual rights and American democracy.

Now, nearly 50 years later, the U.S. Supreme Court will decide whether the pledge of allegiance is unconstitutional because of its reference to God. Last year, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in California ruled in the case of a father of a 9-year-old girl who does not want his child to hear "under God" during classroom recitations of the pledge. Already, students are not compelled by law to recite the pledge. Ironically, the girl is a practicing Christian and is not offended by the reference to God. Regardless, the court will decide the role of God in American life and government for years to come. With the death of communism history has proven that without God in government, freedom cannot long survive. The words "under God" should not be removed from the pledge of allegiance.

The argument against the reference to God in the pledge of allegiance is flawed. The words are not unconstitutional. Critics of the pledge of allegiance will say that it "violates the separation of church and state" when conformed by one of these critics, ask him to cite that phrase in the U.S. Constitution. These words are not in the Constitution and only appeared in a letter by Thomas Jefferson to a group called the Danbury Baptists. This is a good start, but the critics will not stop there.

Another argument by critics is that the establishment clause of the Constitution, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," bans the reference to God. This is false, as there is no establishment of a religion that takes place by including "God" in the pledge. Not only does this not

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establish a religion, but the reference to God does not mention a specific religion at all. The reason for the establishment clause to begin with was the fear held by the Founding Fathers of a federal religion such as the Church of England. At the same time, the founders respected the right of the people to have God in their government. Proof of this is that at the time of the passage of the Bill of Rights, most of the colonies had official taxpayer-supported religions.

John Adams, the second U.S. president said, "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other." Adams and the other Founding Fathers built U.S. democracy on the basis of natural rights, or in other words, that people's rights come from God and not the government. As soon as a government no longer respects God, there is little reason not to trample the rights of its citizens. This is what justified their revolt against the tyranny of English rule and why the U.S. Constitution, the Declaration of Independence and the Oath of Office all invoke the name of God. That is also why the Supreme Court has a monument to the Ten Commandments, why the Supreme Court and Congress open in a prayer and why America's national motto is "In God We Trust." Following the 9th Circuit's reasoning, even the Constitution is unconstitutional.

Fundamentally, the reference to God in the pledge is an acknowledgement and reminder that the United States was settled and established by a religious people, and that America's form of government depends on Divine Providence to survive. Without God, there is no such thing as good and evil, and freedom and tyranny cannot be recognized as such. It took the American Revolution to win the citizens of the United States their God-given rights. It took the Cold War to remind America of the threat that a Godless government poses on the world. Hopefully, it will not take another war for America to preserve God in our country and government.

Matt Maddox is a senior management major.

The pledge of allegiance has changed quite a bit since its first inception by the Rev. Francis Bellamy in 1892.

Minor word changes were made in 1923 and 1924. It wasn't until 1942 that Congress officially recognized and added it to the U.S. Flag Code, although it changed its salute to placing your hand over your heart from the original version that bore resemblance to the Nazi salute. Finally, the phrase "under God" was added in 1954 by President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Though that was almost 50 years ago, the pledge may soon see yet another adjustment — this time to undo the last one.

In 2000, Michael Newdow sued a California school district, claiming that the teacher-led pledge of allegiance containing the phrase "under God" constituted "daily indoctrination" with "religious dogma." Last week, the U.S. Supreme Court decided to consider whether Newdow has the legal right to challenge this policy. He maintains that it is a violation of the First Amendment's establishment clause. The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals agreed, and if the Supreme Court correctly looks at the facts, it will too.

"Leading schoolchildren in a pledge that says the United States is 'one nation under God' is as objectionable as making them say we are a nation 'under Jesus,' a nation 'under Vishnu,' a nation 'under Zeus,' or a nation 'under no god,' because none of these professions can be neutral with respect to religion," U.S. Circuit Judge Alfred T. Goodwin wrote.

Many religious and conservative groups are crying about a "moral decay" infecting the country, but this isn't true. Recent Supreme Court rulings striking down sodomy laws, the Ten Commandments in a courtroom and now references to God have nothing to do with slacking morals. In fact, it shows the government taking steps to apply greater integrity in its structure in ruling by objective laws applicable to all rather than yielding to the beliefs held by some. Those who further complain that the founders never intended church and state to be completely separate are also erroneous: The term "wall of separation" began with Thomas Jefferson.

It's true that students are not required to recite the pledge, thanks to a Supreme Court ruling meant to protect religions that regarded



MIKE WALTERS

the pledge as flag-worship immoral by their standards. This ruling, however, does not apply to teachers, who must lead the class in recitation regardless of possible objections.

Whether the government forces citizens to recite the pledge or not, it doesn't change the fact that including the phrase "under God" gives the ceremony a spiritual aspect by including a subjective statement not all parents and students may agree with. "Students are effectively forced to be part of a religious observance and they are expected to stay while it is going on," said the Rev. Barry Lynn of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. Regardless of one's personal beliefs, it is wrong to force them onto others who may become uncomfortable as a result. And the originator of that force should never be the government.

Congress added "under God" at the height of the Cold War due to the urging of the Knights of Columbus and religious leaders who wanted to distinguish the United States from what they regarded as godless communism. When Eisenhower signed the legislation, he declared that "millions of our schoolchildren will daily proclaim in every city and town, every village and rural schoolhouse, the dedication of our nation and our people to the Almighty." Eisenhower's statement was wildly presumptuous to believe that every American at the time and today would feel the need to assert "dedication to the Almighty." The fact he used government power to enforce his personal religious beliefs on the rest of the country made the action inappropriate and outside of his authority.

If the government wanted to distinguish itself further from communism, there are much better ways to do so. Throwing out socialist regulation of private businesses would have been a better assertion of capitalism rather than demanding that American schoolchildren publicly endorse mysticism. Though we cannot change the past, the Supreme Court does have the opportunity to correct it now.

Justice Antonin Scalia has removed himself to the sidelines in this issue because of his inability to be impartial. Should the remaining eight justices deadlock 4-4, the lower court's ban on the phrase will stand, affecting nine western states and Guam. However, it is only proper for the Supreme Court to apply the lower court's ruling to the entire country, out of respect for constitutional principle that keeps the government from making any law that pushes religious beliefs on the entire country. Let's hope it does the right thing.

Mike Walters is a senior psychology major.

MAIL CALL

Drinking memories disgrace student

In response to Bart Shirley's Oct. 20 article:

I am disgusted and disappointed with the article written on the tragic death of Levi Windle. When someone dies, they should be remembered with fond thoughts and memories, not incidents involving the humiliation of fellow classmates or standing on a table at a bar half naked. It was written with complete disrespect and disregard to the deceased's family and friends.

While I did not know Levi Windle personally, I am sure that there are more positive things to remember about his life and personality than his drinking habits and ability to "mortify" friends in public.

I sincerely hope that in the future the writers at The Battalion take into consideration the thoughts and feelings of other people before writing such off-color material.

Daphne Ruoff
Texas A&M employee

Schools must find abstinence alternative

In response to an Oct. 20 mail call:

It is not a question of teenagers being capable, or responsible, enough to make so called "adult decisions." The fact is that they are making these decisions, and they are making them with very little, if any, education. Sexual responsibility cannot be taught in class; however, we can inform teenagers about sex

so that they are able to make educated decisions. Let's take a look at how well this method of not educating has worked on so many of the adults in our society. We keep spending so much money on probation, incarceration and rehabilitation, but why aren't we spending more money on education? Why not try stopping the problem before it becomes a problem?

Anybody that has ever attended a good sexual education class should know that there is a lot of discussion about the many consequences of having sex. It is a common teaching method that condoms can break, and your life can be altered in one instance. In some ideal societies, people may abstain from sex until they are married; however, it is absurd to think that every person in this society is going stay a virgin until they are married. I think that it is time to stop being so narrow-minded, and think of other options.

William Brown
Class of 2004

People should not judge other's actions

In response to an Oct. 21 mail call:

Many Christians do try to use the Bible to justify their holier than thou attitude and some try to justify "bashing" gays, and that is wrong. We are to love others more than ourselves. I also have to agree that scripture does state that we are not to judge people, it simply isn't our place. What we must understand is that the Bible does tell us right and wrong. There are no gray areas. If you want to argue the validity of scripture so you can sleep better at night, then that is

your right. Although we are not to judge people, we are to judge whether or not their actions are right or wrong, and it is clearly spelled out, regardless of whether you believe it or not. Life all comes down to a choice. We can choose God and the sacrifice of his son for our wrong choices or we can choose to reject the Bible.

Joshua Clay Jacobson
Class of 2004

Absence of Bonfire ruins traditions

In Ms. Lenchner's article, Beth Weisinger is labeled as a crew chief. The title crew chief refers to the male leaders out at Bonfire. Female leaders have a similar position but are called co-chairs.

Either title refers to a position that has been earned through the pass down system. The pass down system is and always has been a time honored tradition to pick the leaders of the group that show loyalty and dedication not just to Bonfire but to everything the group stands for. The pass down is from the current leaders to those they feel show the greatest potential for the upcoming year. These leaders have gained the respect of those they work around and those that work under them. A co-chair must have someone older than her to recognize her knowledge and leadership skills, and others affiliated with the group who are willing to recognize their authority and work underneath them.

It offends those who have earned the title that some will claim it without working to distinguish themselves. This is yet another example of how the rich traditions of this uni-

versity are dwindling without Bonfire on campus to preserve what so many former Aggies know and love.

Mary Bridges and Jessica Miller
Classes of 2006 and 2005

Free speech issues brought wrong point

In response to an Oct. 16 article:

RHA was discussing whether to publicly state an opinion about grody yells. During the debate I stated that I do not believe people should be able to yell whatever they want in public when it infringes on other people's right not to hear it. That statement did not correctly bring across my point. I believe it goes both ways. People have a right to free speech but I realize people can say what they want in public (as

long as it is not illegal), but people can also ask you to stop. They have that right. I think a lot of times that is forgotten, and maturity flies out the window. As far as the issue with grody yells, I think a specific yell was targeted but we need to keep in mind that it is an issue that affects us all. Could you walk up to a mob of people and ask them to stop yelling something that scares, belittles or degrades you?

Amanda Karlik
Briggs Hall President.

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 200 words or less and include the author's name, class and phone number. The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 014 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters also may be mailed to: 014 Reed McDonald, MS 1111, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-1111. Fax: (979) 845-2647 Email: mailcall@thebattalion.net

