

AMERICAN ATHEISTS, INC.

<http://www.atheists.org>

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For more information, please contact:

Ellen Johnson, President (908) 276-7300

Dave Silverman, Communications Director (732) 648-9333

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REPUBLICAN PUSH FOR RELIGION LITIGATION ACT PENALIZES EFFORTS TO PRESERVE SEPARATION SAYS ATHEIST GROUP

An Atheist civil rights group today warned that House Republicans are endangering the constitutional separation of government and religion by promoting a bill that would prevent litigants from recovering legal fees in cases pertaining to the First Amendment.

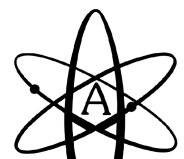
The House Judiciary Committee recently held hearings on the "Public Expression of Religion Act" (HR 2679) introduced by Rep. John Hostettler. A vote is expected shortly, and Republicans hope to bring the measure to the full House in the next three weeks as part of their "American Values Agenda." The bill proposes to amend U.S. law by "eliminating the chilling effect on the constitutionally protected expression of religion by State and local officials that results from the threat that potential litigants may seek damages and attorney's fees," according to the official summary.

"This is not about personal religious expression, it is about unconstitutional and unfair promotion of religion by government," said Ellen Johnson, President of American Atheists. "This bill is designed to make it more expensive and difficult for private individuals and advocacy groups to take public officials to court when they engage in improper activities like displaying the Ten Commandments on government property or promoting public prayer."

Dave Silverman, Communications Director for American Atheists, said if enacted, PERA would be "a green light for government to bully citizens and promote sectarian religion."

"If Rep. Hostettler is concerned about legal challenges to promotion of religion by state and local government, he needs to ask himself why these cases are filed in the first place."

AMERICAN ATHEISTS is a nationwide movement that defends civil rights for Atheists; works for the total separation of church and state; and addresses issues of First Amendment public policy.



American Atheists, Inc. P. O. Box 5733 Parsippany, NJ 07054-6733

Tel.: (908) 276-7300 Fax: (908) 276-7402