

COMMENTARY

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Using God as football for politics

The gesture has gone little noticed and for good reason. It was meaningless. The U.S. House came out in favor of God the other day, by 401-5. Presumably he is tickled. Or she is.

Nothing was more certain in this election year than that, once a federal appellate court had judged the "under God" part of the Pledge of Allegiance in violation of the Constitution's separation of church and state, politicians would hustle to line up with the deity.

The only wonder is that it took so long. The 9th Circuit court ruled in June. Congress, on a gimme like this, usually goes from zero to 60 mph in about two seconds.

Few lures, short of cash contributions, are more appealing to your average working politician than a crack at a little innocence by association. And never mind that the associate stands mute on the issue.

The resolution passed by the House is pointless. For one thing, it is non-binding. For another, most legal experts expect the Supreme Court to overturn the appellate ruling anyway on the grounds that any harm from the godly pledge is minimal, slipping in under constitutional radar.

The Senate already has passed a similar resolution, including, while it was at it, support for the motto "In God We Trust." The House's new wrinkle is an instruction that hats are to be removed for the pledge and held on the left shoulder by the right hand placed over the heart. The Senate no doubt will concur and maybe even raise the ante with further instructions for pantomiming piety.

Just a wild guess, but here's betting President George W. Bush will sign the resolution.

Poor God has been a political football in this matter from the start. The pledge had been an unexceptional bit of civic liturgy for years when Congress in 1954 hammered God into it.

The Cold War was at its worst about then, professional hysterics were seeing Commies under every bed and the idea was to dramatize the difference between God-fearing America — God-loving never entered into it — and the godless Soviet Union.

The point hardly needed to be driven home. Ideologically atheist, the Soviets themselves were proclaiming their godlessness with evangelical zeal.

This is one of those church-state matters that even many strict separationists don't give much of a hoot about. The issue wasn't pressed by the usual civil-liberty suspects but by a lone father with a beef about his second-grade daughter being subjected to what he figured was low-grade proselytizing.

He has a point, but the point is in the "Yeah, but..." range.

Nine members of the House upheld the democratic end of things, making sure not even God could get a unanimous vote.

In addition to the five who voted no, four voted present. All had one overarching, unifying intellectual principle in common. Safe districts.

Tom Teepen is a columnist for Cox Newspapers.



Peter Utsey Emerald

Letters to the editor

No such thing as free lunch

This letter is in response to Ruth Duemler's letter on Oct. 7, concerning Measure 23 in the upcoming election.

Measure 23 is being proclaimed by its supporters as health and dental care for everyone, no matter what your income level. This is true, but the taxpayers must stop for a second and think where all the money is going to come from. Right out of the taxpayer's pocket! The harsh truth is that Measure 23 will force the average Oregonian to pay about double the income tax they do now.

Measure 23 is also one of the biggest job-killing measures Oregon has ever seen. Within two to four years, virtually everyone in

Oregon working for health care providers and related businesses will be out of a job.

This measure will also hurt businesses in Oregon, small or large. Measure 23 will impose an 11.5 percent tax on employers in addition to the taxes they already pay on employees. The result: Established businesses will leave Oregon, and new businesses will go elsewhere because of Oregon's unfavorable business taxes, slowing growth and increasing unemployment even further.

Essentially, Measure 23 is putting every Oregonian on the Oregon Health Plan. Oregonians deserve the right to choose their health care plan and how much they want to pay. Vote no on Measure 23 to keep your freedom of choice.

Brian DeLaGrange
 senior
 business administration

Act quickly to vote

With less than a week left to register to vote in November's elections, we as students need to act quickly in order to make sure that our peers are registered to vote. Oregon's current budget crisis makes this fall's election crucial to students throughout the state.

A variety of important state services — including tuition subsidies — are on the chopping block, and the only way that we can prevent these cuts is to send Oregon's legislators a clear message at the ballot box. It is imperative that students register to vote and encourage others to do likewise.

Tim Johnson
 senior
 political science and history

Congress acted wisely in arming airline pilots

DALLAS (KRT) — In the year since the horrific terrorist skyjackings of September 11, 2001, Air Force jets have forced a number of passenger planes to land due to suspicious actions taken by passengers.

Most recently, on Sept. 11, 2002, the anniversary of the world's worst terrorist assault, a plane flying from Las Vegas to Memphis was forced to land in Ft. Smith, Arkansas. Thankfully, no more planes have been taken over by terrorists — thus far.

But, what if they had?
 Or, what if they are in the future?

At the present time, our final line of defense is for the U.S. Air Force to shoot down skyjacked jets, passengers and all, before they are turned into manned missiles. Re-

cently, Congress acted to prevent this terrible and avoidable scenario by voting to arm pilots, even though that should have been the first response to the threat of terrorism.

It's good that Congress finally got on board because, while increasing security at airports is a good idea, no system is perfect. Over the 2002 Labor Day weekend, for example, reporters from The New York Daily News carried a variety of knives and other weapons through checkpoints at 11 U.S. airports.

Airline pilots are among the most highly trained and carefully screened professionals in the world. About 55 percent of the nation's 114,000 pilots are former military personnel with extensive firearms training.

Each pilot is daily entrusted with aircraft

valued at many millions of dollars, carrying both thousands of gallons of extremely volatile jet fuel and thousands of passengers. Their job requires them to make split-second, critical decisions, sometimes in life-or-death circumstances.

America should not, and need not, suffer through another day like Sept. 11, 2001, ever again. Arming pilots is not only the best response to keep both airline passengers and people on the ground safe from terrorist assaults in the sky, it also the most likely to prevent terrorist acts altogether. People already trust pilots with their lives — it's time to trust them with firearms.

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