



THE HUMANIST SOCIETY OF GAINESVILLE



THE PROMETHEAN HUMANIST

September 2002

Religious Posters Mandated in Levy County Public Schools

An exemplary teacher at Chiefland Middle School, Melynda Alcock, is being forced to teach in a religiously hostile atmosphere. Ms. Alcock has been teaching for 17 years. She does not profess a belief in a deity, yet she is required to maintain a gold-framed poster in her classroom with the words "In God We Trust" emblazoned on it. Worse yet, she is being threatened with termination for "gross insubordination" if she takes any steps to remove or cover the offending plaque. That is outrageous!

Members of the American Family Association and Christian Coalition distributed the "In God We Trust" posters to various schools. It is their way of getting around the requirement that public schools remain neutral regarding religion. And make no mistake about it, this is their way of introducing religion disguised as civic virtue, ie teaching about the National Motto.

This great country was founded on the noble Jeffersonian ideal that government "shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion." This means much more than simply forbidding a National Church – it means the government must not take sides, neither promoting nor inhibiting religion.

A prominently-placed, gold-framed poster declaring "In God We Trust" sends an unmistakable message to school children that the teacher and the school favor religion, in particular the Christian religion synonymous with "God." The poster promotes the Christian religion the same way a poster showing nutritional food promotes a healthy diet.

Ms. Alcock's sincerely held belief should not be disregarded, nor should the Constitution. No Christian teacher would be expected to teach with a Satanic symbol on his/her wall, so a nonreligious teacher should not be required to endure the "In God We

Trust" poster. It is not "anti-religion" for the school to remain neutral; if anything it could be considered "pro-religion" because it lets each student choose as his/her conscience dictates without interference. That is how the "free exercise of religion" is supposed to work.

Please help ensure that Ms. Alcock and all students at Chiefland Middle School can freely exercise their Constitutional rights. Take down the "In God We Trust" posters and let Ms. Alcock do what she does best – teach.
- Mark Mayfield

Please send letters, call, or email:

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Levy County School Board
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OPEN MEETING: 7:30 p.m., Monday, September 9, 2002

§ This month's meeting will be held in the Board Room at SFCC Downtown Campus §

Please note the date printed on the address label to determine when you need to renew your membership!

These are excerpts from the response of the Chiefland High School principal to a letter from ACLU attorney:

1) The section of state policy that allows the posting of any “historic materials” in classroom by a principal or superintendent. And interestingly enough, the section (F.S. 233.0651) lists several acceptable materials including “the national motto”. I have reproduced some of the document here; 233.0651. Historic material; use in public school settings or events. Each district school board may allow any teacher or administrator to read, or to post in a public school building or classroom or at any school-related event, any portion of the following historic material: the national motto, the national anthem, the Constitution....(it goes on at length), However, any material read, posted, or taught pursuant to this provision may be presented only from a historical perspective and in a nonproselytizing manner. ...(I omit another section)... Avoid expressing statements out of the context they were originally made. (omit again) No material shall be selected to advance a particular religious, political, or sectarian purpose.

2) School Board meeting minutes 5/21/02 states as follows: “The President of the Levy Christian Coalition presented the school board with a framed poster of the National Motto and asked the Board’s permission to place one in each classroom, which the board granted. In addition, she said the posters which were donated by organizations and individuals would first be given to elementary schools and then provided for each middle and high school. [note* No mention of the cost of county labor to attach all these posters to the walls with screws, countywide]

3) Copy of an email sent to all principals from the superintendent Cliff Norris reads: “At the direction of the Board and with my authorization, our maintenance department will be installing framed copies of our national motto “In God We Trust” in your school. These will be installed in every classroom in the district over the next few weeks. If you would like copies elsewhere within your school, please contact Ted Alexander.

For your information, this is permitted by F.S. 233.0651. Please call me if you have questions. Cliff”

4) A copy of the section of School Board Policy pertaining to suspension/dismissal of any employee found guilty of gross insubordination was included.

5) The letter states: “ In addition, please consider this correspondence follow up notification from me that the Board’s placement of the National Motto in the classroom to which you are assigned will not be removed, obstructed, or otherwise impeded from student view by you. Failure to follow this reasonable and legal directive shall be considered gross insubordination, which is grounds for disciplinary action.

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