

Trump boosts bills to teach his favorite book — the Bible — in public schools

President Trump signaled his support on Monday for state bills that would allow public schools to teach courses in the Bible, which he once proclaimed was his favorite book.



Trump's tweet came minutes after "Fox & Friends" aired a segment Monday morning on pending legislation in six states — Florida, Indiana, Missouri, North Dakota, Virginia and West Virginia — that would allow Bible literacy courses to become a part of a public school education.

"Nothing beats the Bible," Trump famously said on the campaign trail in 2015 — not even "The Art of the Deal."

The Christian activists who crafted the template for inserting the Bible into public school curricula celebrated the president's endorsement of the idea.

"We were excited to see it happen," Steven Fitschen, president of the National Legal Foundation, told Yahoo News. "The model bill that we were involved with is for the state level, but we were excited to see him use his bully pulpit, so to speak."

Fitschen said the Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation — a nonprofit group formed by former Virginia Republican Congressman J. Randy Forbes to promote "restoring Judeo-Christian principles" — hired him to help draft the text of legislation that could withstand First Amendment challenges to teaching the Bible in schools.

"We looked at what was already in existence and tried to craft a model bill so we could eliminate any constitutional problems, so there could be a course that taught about Islam or Buddhism or any other religion. Many other schools already have comparative religion courses," Fitschen said. "The reason we centered in on the Bible, the Old Testament and the New Testament, is the history of the

country, how much of our idiom and our political framework, all these things that were biblically derived because of the historical situation with many of the early colonists.”

The American Civil Liberties Union blasted both the attempt to infuse Bible literacy courses in public schools and Trump’s support of it. Its concern is that, notwithstanding Fitschen’s self-proclaimed commitment to religious neutrality, in practice the courses could, at least in some states, amount to a form of Christian evangelism.

“Yet again, President Trump is exploiting religious divisions to score political points. Public school Bible courses are rarely taught neutrally and objectively as required by the Constitution,” Daniel Mach, director of the ACLU Program on Freedom of Religion and Belief, told Yahoo News in an email. “Instead, these courses usually resemble Sunday school classes that blatantly violate students’ and parents’ First Amendment rights. Religious education is best left to families and faith communities, not public school officials.”

Just as the pro-business American Legislative Exchange Council crafts model bills that can be adapted and introduced in states across the country, the Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation’s blueprint for inserting the Bible into public schools follows a similar starter-kit approach.

“We don’t get involved with the legislative battles,” Fitschen said. “Instead what we do is we put together model bills that we think would work in any of the 50 states, and it’s up on the foundation website.”

While bills following the foundation’s template failed to pass in Alabama, Iowa and West Virginia last year, Kentucky passed its version, House Bill 128, in 2017, over objections from the ACLU, and it was signed into law by Republican Gov. Matt Bevin.

Supporters of Bible literacy classes say the text is being taught as a historical and cultural document, but the ACLU contends that including it in the curriculum is a way to promote religion.

Source:

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