

“UNDER GOD” UNDER DEBATE

Should the phrase "under God" be removed from the Pledge of Allegiance?

Congress shall make no law regarding an establishment of religion . . .

-- Establishment Clause, First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

The words of the Pledge of Allegiance are familiar to almost every American. Yet few realize that its wording differs from its original version, penned in 1892. Congress added “under God” in 1954, at a time when the United States wanted to distinguish itself from godless communist countries.

This year, the U.S. Supreme Court will review an unpopular 2-1 decision handed down in June 2002 by a three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. In that case, a California father, himself an atheist, claimed his young daughter was harmed by watching her teacher lead her fellow classmates in reciting the Pledge. (Students can refrain from saying the Pledge if they choose, the Supreme Court ruled in a



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landmark 1943 decision.) The three-judge panel said Congress had acted unconstitutionally in adding the words “under God” to the Pledge. It also ruled that the school district “conveyed a message of state endorsement of a religious belief” by requiring teachers to lead students in reciting the Pledge in its current form.

Is the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause violated if public school students recite the Pledge with the words “under God” in it? If so, should the phrase be struck from the Pledge? The U.S. Supreme Court is expected to hand down its decision this spring or summer.

Should the phrase "under God" be removed from the Pledge of Allegiance?

YES

- The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment says the government must remain neutral in religious matters. Keeping “under God” in the Pledge means that the government endorses religion as desirable.
- “Under God” endorses a particular religious belief—the Judeo-Christian concept of a single deity, “God.” Yet other faiths have different views about a deity or deities, and other people do not believe in a deity at all.
- You should be able to pledge your loyalty to the flag and to the country without having to express a religious belief.

NO

- The phrase “under God” does not imply that the federal government is seeking to establish religion or that it has any view, one way or the other, about religious belief.
- In the context of the full Pledge, the words “Under God” offer a patriotic expression of the importance of religion in the nation’s heritage. They don’t endorse one religious viewpoint over another.
- If it bothers you, you can just omit “under God” when reciting the Pledge. But others should also have the right to say those words if they choose to do so.