

REMARKS BY PRESIDENT CLINTON ON RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IN SCHOOLS

(James Madison High School, Vienna, Virginia, July 12, 1995)

This country...was founded by people of profound faith who mentioned Divine Providence and the guidance of God twice in the Declaration of Independence.

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Religious freedom is literally our first freedom. It is the first thing mentioned in the [Constitution]. [I]t says Congress cannot make a law that either establishes a religion or restricts the free exercise of religion.

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*The First Amendment does not--I will say again--does not convert our schools into religion-free zones....*If a student is told she cannot bring a Bible to school, we have to tell the school, no, the law guarantees her the right to bring the Bible to school....There are those who do believe our schools should be value-neutral and that religion has no place inside the schools. But I think that wrongly interprets the idea of the wall between church and state

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*First of all, the First Amendment does not require students to leave their religion at the schoolhouse door....*Some school officials and teachers and parents believe that the Constitution forbids any religious expression at all in public schools. That is wrong. Our courts have made it clear that is wrong.

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Teachers can and certainly should teach about religion and the contributions it has made to our history, our values, our knowledge...and to the development of the kind of people we are....Students should feel free to express their religion and their beliefs in homework, through art work, during class presentations, as long as it's relevant to the assignment. If students can distribute flyers or pamphlets that have nothing to do with the school, they can distribute religious flyers and pamphlets on the same basis. If students can wear T-shirts advertising sports teams, rock groups or politicians, they can also wear T-shirts that promote religion.

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What we have to do is to work together to help all Americans understand exactly what the First Amendment does. *It protects freedom of religion by allowing students to pray, and it protects freedom of religion by preventing schools from telling them how and when and what to pray.*

....

This country needs to be a place where religion grows and flourishes.... Don't you believe that if every kid in every difficult neighborhood in America were in a religious institution on the weekends, the synagogue on Saturday, a church on Sunday, or a mosque on Friday, don't you really believe that the drug rate, the crime rate, the violence rate, the sense of self-destruction would go way down and the quality of the character of this country would go way up?

Office of the Press Secretary (The White House, July 12, 1995) (emphasis added).