

Liberty Watch

Attorney General Seeks to Overturn Pledge Ruling

Attorney General Alberto Gonzales said the Justice Department would fight to overturn a federal court ruling that the Pledge of Allegiance can't be recited in public schools because it refers to God, the Associated Press (AP) reported. Gonzales said the Supreme Court has affirmed "time and again that such official acknowledgements of our nation's religious heritage, foundation and character are constitutional," Gonzales said in a statement. The ruling by U.S. District Judge Lawrence Karlton in San Francisco could put the issue before the Supreme Court, which declined to hear a similar case last year. The high court said the plaintiff, atheist Michael Newdow, did not have standing to file suit on behalf of his daughter because he did not have custody of her. In the current case, Newdow is acting as attorney for the three parents who challenged the pledge because it contains the words "under God." After Karlton's ruling, the Senate unanimously approved a resolution stating that the phrase "one nation under God" is "fully constitutional," the AP reported.

Appeals Court Permits Ten Commandments Display

A Nebraska federal appeals court ruled Aug. 19 that a Ten Commandments monument could remain in a Plattsmouth city park, the Associated Press (AP) reported. The 11-2 decision reversed a previous decision, citing the Supreme Court's recent ruling that it was constitutionally permissible for a Ten Commandments monument to remain on the grounds of the Texas Capitol. In that decision, the high court determined that the monument was a legitimate tribute to the nation's legal and

religious history, the AP said. Writing for Nebraska's 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, Judge Pasco Bowman said the park display "makes passive and permissible use of the text of the Ten Commandments to acknowledge the role of religion in our nation's heritage."

Abstinence Program Funding Suspended

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) suspended funding for the Silver Ring Thing abstinence program Aug. 22, saying it "includes both secular and religious components that are not adequately safeguarded," the Washington Post reported. Officials ordered the group to submit a "corrective action plan" in order to be considered for a \$75,000 grant this year, the newspaper said. The move came three months after the American Civil Liberties Union filed suit against HHS, saying its activities and materials were "permeated with religion." Joel Oster, senior litigation counsel at the Alliance Defense Fund, which is representing Silver Ring Thing, said the group offers both a religious and a secular program, though its Web site said a secular program was "in development," the Post said.