

Liberty Watch

City Council Orders Removal of Cross

The San Diego City Council ordered the removal of a 50-year-old cross that has stood on government land since 1954, the San Diego Union Tribune reported. After a 16-year battle, the council voted 5-3 on March 8 to remove the Mount Soledad cross, arguing that its display was a violation of the separation of church and state. The fight over the cross began in 1989 when two atheists filed suit against the city. The case led to a 2002 appeal before the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, which ruled that it would be unconstitutional both to display the cross or sell the land on which it sits to a private buyer. City officials have yet to determine where or when the cross will be moved.

Senator Vows to Protect Boy Scouts' Support

Sen. Bill Frist, R-Tenn., promised to pass legislation that would shield the Boy Scouts of America from lawsuits challenging its federal support because the organization issues a religious oath to members, the Washington Times reported. Frist's bill, which has bipartisan support, says "no federal law, directive, rule, instruction or order should limit any federal agency from providing support to the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts," the Times reported. The legislation is in response to an ongoing lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union, which argues that federal support for the Scouts violates the separation of church and state.

Tennessee Passes Marriage Amendment

On March 17, Tennessee's legislature passed a constitutional amendment that would prohibit same-sex marriage, Baptist Press (BP).reported. The decision means the issue will be put before voters in November 2006. Tennessee is the fourth state legislature this year to send a marriage amendment to voters, following Alabama, Kansas and South Dakota. Currently, 16 states have constitutional amendments banning gay marriage; Hawaii has an amendment allowing the state legislature to prohibit the practice. Fifteen other states are considering marriage amendments. Though constitutional amendments are often said to be the only way to protect traditional marriage, state amendments can be challenged in federal court, BP said.