

Another Veterans Memorial Under Attack

The secularist assault on veterans memorials continues.

While a court is being asked to reconsider the 90-year-old Bladensburg World War I Veterans Memorial, another display in honor of America's veterans is now under attack. This one is just down the road from a display that was forced to be moved a year ago.

According to the *Albia Union-Republican* newspaper in Iowa, the Welcome Home Soldier Monument, an honored place in the heart of Iowa and a grateful nation where all soldiers, living and deceased, can be at home with their comrades, is now being attacked by the Americans United for Separation of Church and State. The Washington, organization went after a veteran memorial in nearby Knoxville last summer.

Now the organization, which bills itself as a "nonpartisan educational organization dedicated to preserving the constitutional principle of church-state separation as the only way to ensure religious freedom for all Americans," has asked the City of Albia and Monroe County to divest themselves from the Welcome Home Soldier Monument. The official complaint, which once again comes from an "anonymous" complainant, reads, in part:

We have received a complaint regarding Monroe County's and Albia City's support of the Welcome Home Soldier war memorial park. The memorial prominently features numerous Latin crosses. We understand that Monroe County donated eight acres of property to a private entity for the memorial site. We further understand that the Albia City enacted a measure earmarking 45 percent of the proceeds of a hotel/motel tax for the memorial park. Finally, we have also

received a report that the County plans to expend taxpayer funds for grounds upkeep and park development and maintenance.

We write to inform you that the use of governmental resources to support this religious display violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Please end all governmental support for this park and recover the resources that have already been provided.

We understand that there has been some controversy over whether the land where the memorial site was lawfully conveyed to the private entity. If the county retakes ownership of the land, it must either remove the crosses from the memorial park or sell the land to a private entity for fair-market value under an open bidding process that does not favor buyers who wish to keep the crosses on the property.

City and county officials were given 30 days to respond, or face a lawsuit. Americans United for Separation of Church and State made similar demands to the City of Knoxville—which is about 30 miles north of Albia—prompting city leaders to capitulate just days before city council elections, which saw several of those who voted to remove the display removed from office by write-in candidates.

The Knoxville display was a frequent element of U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz's presidential stump speech while he campaigned ahead of Iowa's first-in-the-nation caucus in February.

"I had a feeling something like this would come up," Jim Keller, a Vietnam combat veteran who has headed up the Welcome Home Soldier effort, said. "Frankly, I'm sick of it. ... Everything we've done at the memorial has had the approval of either the county board of supervisors or the taxpayers of Monroe County."

He told the local newspaper his group is under a "28E" public-private agreement with the county allowing them to use the land for 20 years and as long as it remains open to the public as a veterans park. Welcome Home Soldier and Monroe County have purchased a lawn mower together, which county employees use to mow Secondary Roads Department property and volunteers use to mow the Welcome Home Soldier Memorial.

Monroe County Attorney John Pabst told the paper he was still processing the letter, but it was his understanding that existing laws authorized funds for veterans parks. He also said he didn't believe the county ever gave money to the Welcome Home Soldier committee.

A rally has been scheduled for Sunday, May 15, at the monument.

Meanwhile, several hundred miles to the east in Bladensburg, Maryland, a new development has emerged in the case of the 90-year-old World War I memorial. A bipartisan group of members of Congress have filed a brief in support of the memorial, asking the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals asked the court to uphold its constitutionality.

In the brief, the Congressional members argue that the Establishment Clause does not prohibit the use of religious text and imagery to honor the nation's military fallen. The use of a cross as a military symbol of courage, sacrifice and remembrance, especially during World War I, is both deeply rooted and widespread here and around the world. They contend that prohibiting the use of a cross to honor and commemorate the nation's military veterans would show a hostility to religion that is inconsistent with the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

"In a time when America is divided over many issues, there is one thing members of the House and Senate, both Democratic and Republican, have agreed on—along with 90 percent of the

American public—our veterans memorials should be protected,” Kelly Shackelford, president and CEO of First Liberty Institute, which is defending the memorial, said. “We must always strive to honor the selfless sacrifice of our fallen heroes.”