

This State Is Trying to Make the Bible Its 'Official Book'

If at first you don't succeed, keep trying.

That's the message Republicans in the Tennessee legislature are sending with a bill aimed at making the Bible the state's "Official Book." A similar bill failed last year, but passed the House of Representatives last week by a wide margin.

The Senate committee that considered the bill passed it on by a 7-1 margin. Senate leaders are opposed to the measure, but concede it is likely to pass this time around.

"It's fundamentally wrong," Senate Majority Leader Mark Norris (R-Collierville) told *The Tennessean* newspaper. "I think it's sacrilegious."

Norris led the effort to kill the bill last legislative session. Lt. Gov. Ron Ramsey, who also has a vote in the Senate—who told the newspaper he reads his Bible daily—said he also has many of the same reasons as Norris, but hasn't said how he intends to vote.

According to the newspaper, Gov. Bill Haslam has personal reservations, as well as questions about the constitutionality of such a bill. He has not yet said what he would do if the bill lands on his desk for a signature.

Similar efforts in Louisiana and Mississippi have failed this year. As it did in those states, the American Civil Liberties Union is working hard to stop the bill from being adopted.

"The rich religious diversity in our state is best respected by ensuring that government does not promote specific religious books," Tennessee ACLU Executive Director Hedy Weinberg said. "Selecting the Bible as the state book amounts

to government promotion of one religion over other religions,
which clearly violates both the U.S. and Tennessee
Constitutions.”