

‘Where It Belongs’: Tennessee House Passes Resolution for Bible to Become State Book

The Tennessee House of Representatives passed a resolution Monday, 55-28, that would make the Bible the “official state book” of Tennessee due to family Bibles containing vital records from the 20th century that would otherwise be lost.

The resolution, HJR 0150, has been proposed by Rep. Jerry Sexton, a minister from Bean Station in East Tennessee, three times over the last few years. Now that it has been passed in the House, it will need to be passed in the Senate to be made into law.

When it was first proposed, critics objected, citing a violation of First Amendment rights and the Tennessee Constitution.

Then-Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam claimed, “Our founders recognized that when the church and state were combined, it was the church that suffered in the long run.”

Rep. Ron Travis, R-Dayton, who has voted against the bill each time, spoke of his belief of the Bible’s importance, but maintained it should still be separate from government.

“The Bible is the greatest book that’s ever been written. There’s no doubt about that in my heart,” said Travis. “I just feel like my Bible, my personal Bible that I have, should be so far away from government.”

“Just like Nathan Bedford Forrest and Ida B. Wells and now the Bible, it’s just our common heritage,” argued Rep. Glen Casada, R-Franklin. “And those things should be welcomed by everyone in Tennessee.”

The resolution argues not only the importance of the historical records found in family Bibles, but highlights the cultural impact the Bible production industry has had on Tennessee as Nashville is the top publisher of Bibles in the nation.

“Even the *Los Angeles Times* has acknowledged the economic impact of the Bible in Tennessee,” the resolution says. Noteworthy Bible publishers Thomas Nelson, Gideons International and United Methodist Publishing House all operate out of Tennessee, bringing a “multi-million dollar industry” to the state, the resolution highlights.

“What I’m trying to do is be respectful of everyone’s concerns, and just put the Bible where I feel like it belongs,” said Sexton.

During the House meeting Monday, Rep. Johnny Shaw voiced concerns that elevating the Bible as the state book would set an unattainable precedent for lawmakers to follow.

“I don’t want to be embarrassed to be coming off as the holiest state in the nation and then not living up to it,” Shaw said.

Sexton assured those in attendance he would take responsibility in putting the Bible in its right place.

“Whether you agree with it or not, this is my way of lifting it up,” Sexton said. “It doesn’t make anybody go to Sunday school, sing ‘Amazing Grace’ or get baptized,” Sexton told the House committee.

Among those in support of the bill is Rep. Terri Lynn Weaver, who took a bold stance against naysayers.

“We either honor the Bible or we don’t,” she said. {eo}

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