

Apostle and Prophet Banned From Colorado School

Alliance Defending Freedom filed a federal lawsuit Wednesday against the Colorado School of Mines on behalf of a former football player prohibited from including a Bible reference on a donor nameplate.

The school offered to allow donors to the school's new athletic facility to include an inscription of the donor's choosing on personalized nameplates that would be placed in the new football locker room and did not provide any restrictions on content. When alumnus Michael Lucas, a former defensive nose tackle for CSM, requested "Colossians 3:23 and Micah 5:9," the school rejected the inscription because one of the verses refers to "Lord" even though the text of the verses would not appear on the nameplate itself.

"Public colleges and universities should encourage, not shut down, the free exchange of ideas, especially in a forum like this. The school initially imposed no restrictions—or even guidelines—on the type of message a donor could include, and contrary to what the school is arguing, the First Amendment protects—not restricts—a simple reference to a Bible verse," said ADF Legal Counsel Natalie Decker. "It's patently ridiculous to argue that a Bible reference that doesn't include the text of the verse is somehow inappropriate simply because someone might look it up and see that 'Lord' is mentioned there."

Wanting to support his alma matter, Lucas, who graduated from CSM in 2003, participated in CSM's fundraising program for the new Clear Creek Athletics Complex. The school offered "naming opportunities" whereby CSM would place a personalized nameplate on lockers in the new football locker room for each donor. Nameplates could include up to three lines of a

personalized message or a quote chosen by the donor.

After making a \$2,500 donation, the school denied Lucas's nameplate inscription request because he wanted his quote to include two Bible references, "Colossians 3:23 and Micah 5:9." Although the text of neither verse would be displayed, CSM officials objected because they said, after the fact, that nameplate quotes could not include the words "Lord," "God," or "Jesus" or make reference to Bible verses that contain those words. They claimed that to allow them would be a violation of the First Amendment; however, the First Amendment actually protects such speech. Furthermore, the school's official policy prohibits "discrimination on the basis of ... religion."

CSM approved other requests for nameplate inscriptions that included quotes such as "Give 'Em Hell," "OK Gentlemen, it's time to gird your loins," and "Take your whiskey clear."

"The United States Constitution prohibits the government from treating religion with hostility or from excessively entangling the government with religion," explains the complaint in *Lucas v. Johnson*, filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Colorado. "The censorship of Mr. Lucas' religious speech—while permitting similar, but nonreligious, private speech from other members of the public regarding the same and similar subject matters—also constitutes viewpoint discrimination, which is unconstitutional in any type of forum."

"Public colleges are supposed to be a marketplace of ideas," added ADF Senior Counsel Tyson Langhofer. "We hope CSM will end the need for this lawsuit and revise its policy so that it affirms the constitutionally protected freedoms of all alumni, regardless of their religious beliefs."