

God and Education: Florida's New Commissioner Draws Fire from Atheist Groups

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is back, and they've got big issues with two things Florida's new commissioner of education did.

First, in a letter to parents, he said that the state "does not assign guilt or blame based on a student's background or the way God created them," Florida's Voice reported.

Then, he ended the letter – which was lengthy and had little to do with religion – with the words "God bless."

Heresy! Secular heresy, that is! And the FFRF isn't taking this lying down.

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According to a Thursday report from the local politics outlet, the group said that Education Commissioner Anastasios Kamoutsas acted in an "inappropriate and exclusionary" manner when he included the language in a letter.

Despite the fact that this was part of a long three-page letter, FFRF contended that the language in the July 14 letter from the Florida Department of Education, sent on the commissioner's first day in office, implied that all parents "believe in a god and subscribe to creationism."

"This is the exact sort of religious favoritism our Constitution forbids," FFRF co-president Annie Laurie Gaylor said.

"Florida's education officials can't talk out of both sides of

their mouths – claiming to protect parental rights while telling millions of families what god their children were supposedly created by,” she added.

Now, what was the purpose of this? Apparently, it’s because one parent – or “at least one unnamed parent,” to use Florida’s Voice’s copy – thought it was “offensive.”

Because of “this kind of language,” the FFRF said, it wants the Florida DOE to rescind the letter and “ensure that all further communications are free from religious bias.”



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That, I assure you, is not the purpose of this letter. As for whether a believing Christian can use Christian language in a letter, I am merely going to point to the First Amendment and call for summary judgment. This is so stupid as to not even invite counter-argument. Instead, it provokes an explanation as to why some random atheist activist is making a stink over a pseudo-issue that even she likely believes is absurd.

There was, at one point in the not-too-distant past, a time when the FFRF was the scourge of sanity. If you had a nativity display up anywhere near city hall, you could expect one of their lawyers to be pounding on your door demanding it be taken down, and pounding on the doors of every local media outlet demanding they cover this affront to the Constitution.

This got real old real fast. Even Easter-and-Christmas Christians, or non-Christians, or people who think crystals heal and karma is a real spiritual process found these people to be ghastly, obsessive buzzkills. This is partially why people like Kamoutsas are now in positions like he’s in right now.

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And he feels emboldened not only to use that language – which is fairly neutral in its tone, and merely acknowledges that the writer is a believer in God, which is as constitutional as it gets – but to use other language that the FFRF and the phalanx of groups that undergirded the movement that made it powerful in the first place find offensive not on constitutional but on ideological grounds.

For instance, the letter spoke of “some of the rights you have as the parent or guardian of a child enrolled in a Florida public school.” Not the power the public school had over your child, but the power you had over the school itself.

“At the heart of this success is you – the parent,” the letter read. “You are your child’s first teacher, and your voice matters.”

Furthermore, he said that parents “have the right to expect instruction that encourages individual responsibility, effort and merit; does not assign guilt or blame based on a student’s background or the way God created them; is objective and factual; aligns with Florida’s state academic standards and protects students from being made to feel inferior or uncomfortable because of their race, sex or religion; [and] builds resiliency.”

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In other words: Bye rainbow flags and safe spaces. Bye lessons on white privilege from NEA apparatchiks. Hello parental rights and education that makes students mentally strong, not subject to the cant of every breeze life blows their way.

Yes, we need more bold, God-fearing leaders like Commissioner Kamoutsas. And somebody remind all of these angry atheists that the First Amendment forbids Congress from establishing a

religion. It does not forbid talking about God, reading the Bible and praying in school – regardless of what the Supreme Court thinks.

Furthermore, what Gaylor and the FFRF refuse to realize is that this backlash all came about not in spite of their best efforts, but because of those efforts. And yet, they still pound their fists loudly on the table, demanding to be heard and wielding the Constitution in the same way the devil quotes Scripture: wrongly, but in a way that sometimes sounds convincing to the untrained ear.

Our ears have been trained with enough of their nonsense by now, alas. Keep banging away, guys. It's even more satisfying now that you've become figures of fun to Christians, not bringers of fear.

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