

Group Wants Atheist Books Placed Next to Gideon Bibles in Georgia Parks' Cabins

A national atheist group said it plans to donate enough books on its views to be placed in all Georgia state park cabins after the state's governor said Bibles should remain at the vacation properties despite an atheist's recent complaint.

But Ed Buckner, the atheist who objected after finding nine Bibles in the state-run lodge he was renting, said on Tuesday he is skeptical that Georgia can find a practical way to allow literature from all groups to be equally represented.

"The right answer, and it's the one I asked for from the very beginning, is to keep all types of religious books and literature out of state park cabins," said Buckner, an author and former president of the non-profit group American Atheists. "I don't know where you draw the line or how you draw the line."

After Buckner complained last month, Georgia officials temporarily removed the Gideons Bibles from state-run lodges and cabins. Governor Nathan Deal ordered them returned last week, saying he did not believe "that a Bible in a bedside table drawer constitutes a state establishment of religion."

The governor said any religious group was free to donate literature.

In response, the American Atheists said they would donate popular atheist books, including *Why I Am An Atheist* by Madalyn Murray O'Hair, *God is not Great* by Christopher Hitchens and *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins.

"American Atheists does not believe the State of Georgia

should be placing Bibles or atheist books in state park cabins; however, if the state is going to allow such distribution, we will happily provide our materials," the group's current president, David Silverman, said in a statement.

Whether those books will be placed in state lodges was not clear. Gov. Deal's spokesman Brian Robinson said on Tuesday the state is in the process of writing regulations on donated literature.

"We've not been in communication with any outside groups," Robinson said.

In response, Gideons spokesman Malcolm Arvin said: "We believe that the Bible is the truth and their literature is not. The truth speaks for itself."

The U.S. Supreme Court on Monday agreed to hear a case that delves into the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment guarantee of separation of church and state. Two residents of Greece, New York, said the town endorsed Christianity by allowing members of the public, who were mostly Christian clergy, to open meetings with a prayer.

Buckner, 67, of Atlanta, said he will not file a lawsuit against Georgia on similar constitutional grounds if the state can develop a policy that treats all groups equally.

But he said there would be many practical and political challenges to creating an all-inclusive policy.

"I think they've opened up a can of worms, and they're going to have a tough time putting all the worms back in," said Buckner.