

Tennessee Senate Rejects Bible as State Book

A proposal to make the Bible the official state book of Tennessee, a measure the state attorney general had said would be unconstitutional, was effectively dropped for the year on Thursday by the state Senate, officials said.

The bill had been approved by the state House of Representatives on Wednesday over objections by Governor Bill Haslam, who called it disrespectful.

Attorney General Herbert Slatery III, religious leaders and others said the measure violated the separation of church and state under both the U.S. and Tennessee Constitutions.

Republicans, who hold strong majorities in the state House and Senate, were divided over the proposal, and the Senate on Thursday referred the proposal to its Judiciary Committee, which is not scheduled to meet again this session.

Lieutenant Governor Ron Ramsey, a Republican who serves as speaker of the Senate, said he was a Christian, a constitutionalist and a conservative who opposed the bill. Sending it to the committee was the right thing to do, he said.

"The Bible is my official book but it need not be the official book of the state of Tennessee," Ramsey said in a statement. Supporters had said it was worth a fight to make the Bible the official state book. Opponents cited concerns about the cost of legal challenges, how the law might be perceived outside Tennessee and the addition of the Bible to an array of other official designations for a state dance, song or amphibian.

"We don't need to put the Bible beside salamanders, tulip poplars and "Rocky Top" in the Tennessee Blue Book to

appreciate its importance to our state,” Ramsey said.

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