

The Ridiculous Threat That Forced a School to Stop Saying, 'God Bless America'

For more than a decade, boys and girls at Glenview Elementary School would start the day by gathering on the playground to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. The children of Haddon Heights, New Jersey, would conclude their patriotic service by saying, "God bless America."

It was a tradition birthed by two kindergarten teachers in the aftermath of the Muslim terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001—a way to honor those who lost their lives on that terrible day.

But that tradition ended Monday—thanks to the American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey.

The school's principal sent a letter to parents advising them that "the Administration has decided to discontinue the official endorsement of reciting 'God bless America' at the end of the morning Pledge of Allegiance.'"

ACLU-NJ legal director Ed Barocas said reciting the phrase "God bless America" is unconstitutional, the *Courier-Post* reports.

"The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution prohibits the government from not only favoring one religion over another, but also from promoting religion over non-religion," he wrote in a letter to the school district's attorney. "The greatest care must be taken to avoid the appearance of governmental endorsement in schools, especially elementary schools, given the impressionable age of the children under the school's care and authority."

Principal Sam Sassano tells me the recitation of "God bless America" has nothing to do with religion.

"It wasn't taught with any intention of having any type of religious overtones," the principal said. "It was taught to show patriotism."

Principal Sassano said he took pride in watching the young patriots voluntarily recite the phrase—"especially since there are so many people out there every day risking their lives to protect us and keep us safe."

Nevertheless, the final decision was determined by the school district—fearing a costly lawsuit.

"Budgets across the state of New Jersey are very tight," the principal said. "We have to be very cautious how we spend taxpayer funds. The amount of legal fees to fight something like this in court could really break a budget."

So thanks to the ACLU, students will no longer be allowed to invoke God's blessing upon America.

"I'm very, very upset about this," said Debi Krezel, the parent of a sixth-grader. "Being a daughter, a sister, niece and cousin of veterans and first responders—as well as) an American and a taxpayer—why are my rights and my child's rights being taken away?"

Mrs. Krezel had nothing but praise for Principal Sassano, and she said she understands why the district had to do what it did—but that still doesn't make it right.

"I don't think it's fair to us or our children," she told me. "What are they going to take from us next? We are slowly chipping away the values and beliefs and traditions that (the nation) was created upon."

Principal Sassano stressed to me that no child has ever been forced to recite the pledge or "God bless America. It's

entirely voluntary.

"We teach the children to be respectful," he said. "So if they choose not to recite the pledge, they stand quietly. Nothing is forced on the child."

Hiram Sasser, the director of litigation for Liberty Institute, told me the ACLU is off base.

"Kids cannot be required to say it, but leading in the recitation of it is as constitutional as the national motto In God We Trust," Sasser told me. "If singing *God Bless America* is good enough for New York, it should be good enough for New Jersey."

It's unfortunate that the ACLU has chosen to bully yet another small, patriotic community—picking on a bunch of children.

It's shameful.

In my estimation, there's nothing civil about the American Civil Liberties Union—or American, for that matter.