

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 13

Whereas, for nearly two thousand years, the Bible has been a cornerstone of Western civilization, its content permeating nearly all aspects of culture, manifesting itself most notably in literature, music, art, drama, public discourse, and philosophy; and

Whereas, wisdom literature from the Bible, which has an emphasis on good character, has been taught for three thousand years but not for the last fifty years by accident; and

Whereas, forty studies have documented a correlation between improved school grades for children and the teaching of the biblical character of love, integrity, compassion, and self-discipline; and

Whereas, biblical references abound in the works of Western literature, including those of William Shakespeare and John Milton, and allusions to biblical themes and characters have been used effectively by writers as diverse as Dante Alighieri and Toni Morrison; and

Whereas, the Bible has been a source for public discourse and policy both past and present, and great leaders, including George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King, Jr., inspired entire generations by including biblical references and language in their speeches; and

Whereas, the English language itself is so filled with biblical vocabulary, themes, terms, and allusions that it cannot be fully understood and appreciated by individuals unfamiliar with the Bible, depriving them of much of the richness of the language; and

Whereas, a report on Bible literacy, which included findings from a Gallup Poll survey on American teenagers' knowledge of the Bible, found that American high school students are deficient in their academic knowledge of the Bible and that this deficiency is a limiting factor in their ability to study literature and to understand art, music, history, and culture; and

Whereas, United States Supreme Court Justice Tom Clark, in the 1963 case *Abington v. Schempp*, wrote that "it might well be said that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization." He further wrote "that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities. Nothing we have said here indicates that such study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistently with the First Amendment"; and

Whereas, in a document entitled *The Bible & Public Schools, a First Amendment Guide*, twenty diverse groups, including the National School Boards Association, American Federation of Teachers,

National Education Association, Christian groups, Jewish groups, and secular groups, all agreed that the Bible can and should be taught in public schools as long as such teaching is academic and not devotional in nature, demonstrates an awareness of the religious nature of the Bible but does not press students to accept religion, does not engage in the practice of religion, neither encourages or discourages differing religious views, and does not ask students to conform to any religious belief; and

Whereas, George Gallup polling and other research over the years has shown that more than two-thirds of the American public believe the Bible should be taught in public schools as part of the curriculum in literature courses, social studies courses, or both literature and social studies courses; and

Whereas, the general assembly realizes the academic advantage to students of a basic familiarity with the Bible:

Now Therefore Be It Resolved that the members of the Missouri Senate, One-hundredth General Assembly, First Regular Session, the House of Representatives concurring therein, hereby:

(1) Encourage public high schools in Missouri to:

(a) Offer to students in grade nine or above:

a. An elective course on the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and their influence and an elective course on the New Testament and its influence; or

b. An elective course that combines the courses described above; and

(b) Require that all world literature courses include a three-week session on wisdom literature from the Bible, as has been done for three thousand years;

(2) Declare that the purpose of the courses described above is to teach students the biblical content, characters, and narratives of the Bible that are prerequisites to understanding contemporary society and culture, along with the role the Bible has played in the development of literature, art, music, culture, and public discourse;

(3) Urge the offering of the courses described above only if the courses:

(a) Do not endorse, favor, or promote, or disfavor or discourage, any particular religion or nonreligious faith or religious perspective;

(b) Are taught by state-certified literature or social studies teachers who have been selected without inquiry into their religious beliefs or lack thereof;

(c) Allow students to choose their preferred translation of the Hebrew Scriptures or the New

Testament; and

(d) Award students the same number of course credits that are awarded for other courses of similar duration;

(4) Urge the offering of the courses described above only if school districts make teacher training available to teachers of the courses so that they are made aware of the best practices involved in teaching the Bible in a public school setting; and

(5) Declare that no state entity, school district, or local educational agency should prevent the teaching of courses or classes on the Bible so long as those courses meet guidelines consistent with the First Amendment; and

Be It Further Resolved that the Secretary of the Senate be instructed to prepare properly inscribed copies of this resolution for each school district in Missouri.

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