

Religious Freedom Coalition

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*** NEWS RELEASE***

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William J. Murray, Chairman of the Religious Freedom Coalition, says Supreme Court decisions on the Ten Commandments illustrate the need for a Religious Freedom Amendment

Having only the previous week dealt a severe blow to the Fifth Amendment's protection of property rights, the Supreme Court on Monday continued its madcap march through the nation's law and culture with its two confusing decisions as to whether the Ten Commandments can ever be displayed on public property. The decision process seems somewhat haphazard -- overturning a Constitutional provision here, outlawing a 200-year-old tradition there.

This is due to the discovery, a few decades ago, of the "evolving Constitution." Customs that were legal since the founding of the country--and before--such as placing a simple display of the Ten Commandments in or around a courthouse, suddenly one day are deemed to be unconstitutional. The First Amendment no longer means what it meant for over 200 years.

Other practices, such as forcing one private citizen to move off of his land so that another private citizen can take over the land, were always interpreted as illegal under the Fifth Amendment. Then one day, what do you know? It's suddenly legal and perfectly O.K.

When the Supreme Court loses its moorings, as sometimes happens -- as with the infamous Dred Scott decision of 1857 in which the Court ruled that blacks could never be citizens -- the elected Congress has to step in and set things right. In that case, the Fourteenth Amendment was added to the Constitution to clarify matters.

It is time for the Congress to clarify what is meant by the First Amendment guarantees of freedom of religion. The federal courts are trapped in an endless maze of bad precedent upon bad precedent, trying to define the meaning of "state endorsement of religion," and "separation of church and state," although neither phrase appears in the Constitution. There is no end in sight to the divisive wrangling over displays of the Ten Commandments, school prayers, city council prayers, displays of nativity scenes, menorahs or other religious symbols, and religious symbols on city seals, the Pledge of Allegiance, etc., etc., and etc.

The Religious Freedom Amendment, which Congressman Istook of Oklahoma has introduced in the House, would greatly help Americans return to their roots of freedom of religious expression. It was never intended by the framers of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights that federal courts should monitor and censor the words used or displayed in every local school, city council meeting and county courthouse in the land.

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