

ARIZONA ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE BANS SANTA CLAUS

The Catholic League triggered a media frenzy in Arizona that embarrassed its Attorney General for supporting a ban on Santa Claus in public areas of her office.

It began when Gale Garriott, chief counsel of the Agency Counsel Division of the Arizona Attorney General's office, issued a memo banning the display of Santa Claus from areas open to the general public. In his memo of November 28, Garriott banned any items "that have a religious significance attached to them." He specifically listed Santa Claus as an example. When workers complained, he issued a memo on December 6 that left in place all the banned items save that he excised the words "religious significance."

In an employee's own work area, "reasonable decorations that are respectful of the views of others and that are consistent with the mission and professionalism [sic] standards of the Office are permissible." In the general work area, "Unacceptable decorations would include nativity scenes, crosses, Stars of David, Christmas trees, Santa Clauses, Santa Claus related items, and other similar items that may be offensive to some of our employees or the public."

As a result of Garriott's decision, workers decided to mock his memo by displaying Holiday Greetings from the Loch Ness monster and Bigfoot.

William Donohue branded Garriott as "Arizona's Commissar of the Commonweal." He then used sarcasm to score points. Referring to Garriott, Donohue said, "he needs to explain more fully what he means by decorations that are 'respectful of the views of others.'" Donohue suggested, "For example, snowflakes may be innocuous to him, but not to others. Therefore, why

should he imply a tolerance for snowflakes when he could simply have added them to his censorial bag? After all, it makes no sense to ban Santa and allow snowflakes.”

We contacted Garriott’s boss, Attorney General Janet Napolitano, as well as Arizona Governor, Jane Hull, informing them of their commissar’s edict. We got two very different responses.

Arizona Governor Jane Hull called William Donohue on December 18 thanking him for notifying her of the ban on Santa Claus in public areas of the Attorney General’s office. But Attorney General Janet Napolitano justified the ban by saying that her office constitutes a “people’s lobby” that does not allow displays that might offend those of various “faiths and cultures.”

Donohue told the media, “Arizona Governor Jane Hull is a model of reasonableness.” He also noted that “She not only understands that the ban on Santa is ‘idiocy,’ she is baffled (as we are) that given the events of 9-11 why anyone would want to censor freedom of expression—of such an innocent kind—during the holiday season.”

Donohue then took aim at Napolitano: “It is important to note that there is absolutely nothing in either federal or state law that requires Attorney General Janet Napolitano to support a ban on the display of Santa Claus in her ‘people’s lobby.’ It is purely a matter of her desire: she has a preference for certain types of gag rules.”

The business that some might be offended by Santa was called “a ruse” by Donohue. “Many more are offended by his absence,” he noted. He then asked, “And what exactly is Napolitano going to say to those who say they are offended by pictures of Martin Luther King in her lobby next month? Is she going to take down the pictures in deference to those who are offended or is she going to brand those who object as bigots?”

Donohue ended his comments by saying of Napolitano, "What she refuses to recognize is that anyone who is offended by either the display of Santa, or by pictures of Martin Luther King, in her People's Republic of Arizona lobby, is, in fact, a bigot. And by definition that would certainly include her."

We are pleased that the media did its job by exposing Napolitano. The people of Arizona were overwhelmingly on our side.