

RELIGIOUS RIGHTS IN NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOLS



Bill Donohue comments on a bill that is close to being submitted to North Carolina Governor Pat McCrory for consideration:

North Carolina is set to pass a bill that would ensure the religious liberty rights of school administrators, teachers, and students. If it is adopted, it would prove to be a useful model for every state.

The bill unanimously passed the State Senate last year, and then passed 106-9 this week in the House. Because an amendment to the bill was passed in the House that allows school employees to “adopt a respectful posture,” it was sent back to the Senate for approval. If it succeeds there, it will go to Governor McCrory for his signature.

The ACLU is questioning why more religious liberty rights for students are needed. Evidently, when it comes to religious rights—unlike gay rights—it is possible to have too many.

The bill is modeled on the rules outlined at the federal level. In 2003, under President George W. Bush, the Department of Education issued a document, “Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools,” that detailed the First Amendment religious liberty rights of school personnel and students. In 1995, President Bill Clinton issued a “Memorandum on Religion in Schools” that protected these rights.

Unfortunately, radical secularists continue to violate the

spirit and the letter of the law, necessitating stronger rights for religious expression in the schools. Indeed, what triggered the North Carolina bill was the decision of a teacher in an elementary school who told a student to remove a reference to God in a poem for a Veteran's Day event.

It is not a good sign that we have to question whether a teacher can respectfully bow his head at a student-organized religious event. It's a sure bet that if an objecting teacher raised his middle finger in protest, the ACLU would defend him on free speech grounds. No matter, we anticipate a victory.