

Public Education and Separation of Church and State - 1981

Issues

Preserving our American democratic society through support of quality public education and protection of separation between church and state.

Background

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution says, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Religious liberty has been the foundation of the American democracy allowing all religious groups to practice their religion in freedom while preventing any government body from participating openly or in secret in the affairs of any religious group or vice versa. The American democracy based upon the Constitution and the Bill of Rights guarantees all citizens freedom and equality under the law. In America it has been the public school system that has been the primary transmitter of the American creed and the instrument for preparing successful generations for participation in American life.

Resolution

1) Biblical Creationism—We believe that the doctrine of "scientific creationism" or biblical creationism, which holds that the story of creation as depicted in Genesis describes fully and literally the origin and development of humanity, is a religious concept and not a scientific theory.

Therefore, we urge Sisterhood members to oppose any efforts on the part of legislators or school boards to introduce this subject into the public school curriculum, because we firmly believe such subject matter is a breach of the separation of church and state.

2) Voluntary Prayer in the Schools—We believe that our homes and religious schools offer the appropriate opportunity for the development of religious values in America's children. We oppose prayer in the schools as a violation of the separation of church and state.

We are deeply concerned by the efforts in recent months to obtain approval in the Congress of a bill which would deny federal courts, including the Supreme Court, jurisdiction in suits challenging the constitutionality of voluntary prayer in the public schools. We believe that the attempt to achieve by statute what the Congress has repeatedly refused to do by proposed constitutional amendment is not only a threat to the separation of church and state but also threatens to undermine the balance of power among the three branches of the U.S. government.

The National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods opposes such legislation and urges Sisterhood members to make known their opposition and work with others in convincing legislators and public opinion molders of the necessity to defeat this legislation.

3) Tuition Tax Credits—We are concerned that efforts to obtain government funds for non-public schools continue in spite of court rulings that declare such aid is a violation of the separation of church and state. Recently those favoring such aid to private schools have succeeded in introducing in the Congress bills that would grant parents a federal tax-credit for tuition fees paid to non-public elementary and secondary schools both secular and religious. We believe such bills are indirect public financing of non-public schools and could

ultimately weaken the public school system.

We oppose tuition tax credit legislation and urge Sisterhood members to work in cooperation with like-minded groups in opposing such legislation.

4) Public Education—We urge Sisterhoods to educate their members on the need for a strong public educational system and to encourage their support of adequate funding and resources, quality leadership and educational improvement for all students, especially the poor, disadvantaged and those with special needs.