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My Turn

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'Under God' remains under attack

By Jill Penley

The anti-religionists, represented by well-known atheist Michael Newdow and others, filed suit in the U.S. District Court several years back challenging the inclusion of the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance. NBC chose to remove the phrase "under God" from the Pledge of Allegiance during the introduction to final round coverage of the 2011 US Open a couple of weeks ago.

A quick Google search reveals the original Pledge of Allegiance, "I pledge allegiance to my flag and the Republic for which it stands -- One nation indivisible -- with liberty and justice for all," was written in September of 1892 by Francis Bellamy for "The Youth's Companion" magazine in Boston. The phrase was subsequently printed on leaflets and sent to schools throughout the United States. In 1923, the first National Flag Conference in Washington D.C. voted to change the words "my flag" to "the Flag of the United States of America."

No form of the Pledge received official recognition by Congress until June 22, 1942, when the Pledge was formally included in the U.S. Flag Code and Congress also established the current practice of rendering the pledge with the right hand over the heart stating specifically, the Pledge "should be rendered by standing at attention facing the flag with the right hand over the heart. Members of the Armed Forces and veterans who are present and not in uniform may render the military salute. Persons in uniform should remain silent, face the flag, and render the military salute." The Flag Code also specifies that any future changes to the pledge would have to be with the consent of the President of the United States. The official name of The Pledge of Allegiance was adopted in 1945.

Most opponents of reciting the words "under God" as part of the Pledge bring up the fact that it was not part of the original wording adopted by Congress. The words "under God" were added in 1954 by then President Eisenhower, who stated at the time, "In this way we are reaffirming the transcendence of religious faith in America's heritage and future; in this way we shall constantly strengthen those spiritual weapons which forever will be our country's most powerful resource in peace and war."

Perhaps changing the wording was a bad idea. Perhaps Congress should not have agreed to making changes to the pledge. Perhaps people should have taken a stand, but that's water under the bridge and support for keeping "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance remains popular in America. According to ProCon.org, a nonprofit public charity that has no government affiliations of any kind which gathers and provides resources for critical thinking, seven of seven national polls from 2002 to 2005 show over 65% support for keeping "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance. It also points to the fact that from 2001 to 2006 no sitting United States

senator publicly supported changing the Pledge of Allegiance.

NBC soon issued the following apology for omitting "under God" before the U.S. Open: "We began our coverage of this final round just about three hours ago and when we did it was our intent to begin the coverage of this U.S. Open Championship with a feature that captured the patriotism of our national championship being held in our nation's capital for the third time. Regrettably, a portion of the Pledge of Allegiance that was in that feature was edited out. It was not done to upset anyone and we'd like to apologize to those of you who were offended by it."

Another argument of opponents to "under God" is that the national pledge should be more inclusive of all religions, thus making it more "politically correct." I would argue the phrase "One Nation Under God" does not establish a national religion, but only acknowledges a long tradition of the majority of Americans from many different faiths, believing in God. In fact, our national motto, "In God We Trust," dates back to the coins of the Civil War era and I, for one, happen to believe that we are, and always will be, one nation under God.



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