



NEWS RELEASE

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Series of National Debates on Religious Freedom Issues

Framing a National Debate on Religion and the U.S. Constitution: Religion in the Public Schools

RICHMOND, VA. (October 12, 2006) - The Council for America's First Freedom holds that every American deserves to understand the issues regarding religious freedom and to learn about all sides of a controversy. Therefore, the Council is presenting a series of ten debates which will take place over the next 18 months at law schools around the country. The debates will examine key religious freedom issues in depth and with mutual respect, encouraging open dialogue and educating the public about the importance of religious freedom. The first of these debates will take place at the University of Richmond School of Law on Thursday, October 12, 2006 from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. in the Moot Court Room, and will address religion in the public schools. "The law school is honored to kick off this impressive series of debates. We expect to continue our relationship with the Council to develop programs that examine current religious freedom issues of our times," said Rodney A. Smolla, Dean and Allen Professor of Law at the University of Richmond.

Two nationally renowned experts with opposing viewpoints, Jeremy Gunn, Director of the ACLU's Program on Freedom of Religion and Belief, and Kevin Hasson, President of The Beckett Fund for Religious Liberty will debate the Constitutional issues and public policy

implications of their positions at each of the debates. Ultimately, each strives to develop a jurisprudence that best protects the rights of all as they interpret those rights.

“We hope to identify and inspire an audience that seeks information about the content of disagreement, wants to know more, and respects the diverse positions held,” said Ambassador Robert A. Seiple, President of the Council. “We are delighted to be partnering with the University of Richmond and other prominent law schools to address religious issues that most people are leery of discussing in the public arena.”

Dr. Isabelle Kinnard, Education Director at the Council added, “Rather than knee jerk reactions that have dominated America’s discourse to date, the debates will create an environment for thoughtful reflection and mutual respect. We anticipate that the debates will reduce tension over legal and culture war religion issues by helping our audience gain a greater understanding of them. The debates will attract an academic audience, but will also be open to the general public.”

Some of the debates will be video taped and posted to the Council’s website at a later date. The debate and reception are free and open to the public. For more information, please call (804) 643-1786.

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About the Council for America’s First Freedom

The mission of the Council for America’s First Freedom is to build on a historic legacy of religious freedom that began in Richmond, Virginia in 1786, developed into an American constitutional guarantee and is now recognized as an international human right. Through educational programs in diverse communities here and abroad, we promote understanding and respect for this core value: *the freedom of thought, conscience and belief*. The Council is a politically and religiously neutral 501(c)(3) organization that provides educational outreach programs that encourage audiences worldwide to examine their own consciences, to understand the beliefs of others, and to respect the right of religious freedom for all. For more information, please visit www.firstfreedom.org.

About the University of Richmond School of Law

The University of Richmond School of Law was established in 1870. With an enrollment of approximately 500 students, the Law School continues to keep pace with the changing methods of legal education in order to prepare its graduates for the practice of law in today’s society. The Law School offers a wide range of courses and opportunities for pro bono work and community engagement. The School has three centers of concentrated study, the Center for Actual Innocence, the Intellectual Property Center and the Merhige Center for Environmental Law. Located in Virginia’s capital city and close to Washington, DC, the Law School offers many opportunities for students to gain practical experience working in the private sector, with non-profits, and in local, state and federal government offices.