



NEWS RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL OCT. 3, 2005

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Most Americans Conflicted on Church-State Separation, National Survey Finds

Religious Liberty Embraced, Yet Support for Public In-school Prayer is at 54%

RICHMOND, Va. (Oct. 3, 2005) - Nearly one in three Americans believe that freedom of religion is the single most important Constitutional guarantee - ranked behind only freedom of speech - yet half of those polled in a national survey are much more ambivalent about the separation of church and state.

In the second annual survey, commissioned by the Council for America's First Freedom, a combined 50 percent of respondents said the separation between religion and government should either be less strictly interpreted (27%) or is not necessary at all (23%). Underscoring that sentiment, a total of 54 percent said they would support designated time in public schools for students to pray aloud or in groups, a figure that rises to 66 percent for either silent or after-school prayer.

"There exists a striking paradox between how Americans regard two elements related to religious liberty - the right to worship (or not) as we see fit and the separation of church and state," said Tommy Baer, president of the Council for America's First Freedom, a nonprofit organization dedicated to educating citizens about religious liberty. "While Americans count freedom of religion as among their most precious rights, many citizens apparently make no connection between the right to practice their religion and what can aptly be considered an extension of that

entitlement – that is, keeping matters of faith out of the public domain. The results of this survey reflect a conflicted citizenry on this issue.”

The phone survey, which polled 1,000 Americans over 18, pointed to some other inconsistencies:

- Three in four surveyed (77%) think that religious liberty is as or more important today as it was at the nation’s founding, yet, two-thirds (66%) believe the United States should *not* actively advance the principles of religious freedom around the world.
- Americans overwhelmingly believe that public school teachers should be permitted to read an excerpt from a sacred text as part of the class’s study on the role of religion in America (81%). However, support for that premise decreases depending on the faith being taught. When asked which texts were appropriate for a public school teacher to read in a class on the role of religion in America, the results showed the following different degrees of support:
 - 81% support readings from the New Testament
 - 73% support readings from the Old Testament
 - 72% support readings from an ancient Hindu text
 - 68% support readings from the Koran
- The public display of religious icons showed varying levels of opposition:
 - 21% oppose the posting of the Ten Commandments in a public courthouse
 - 19% oppose the display of a nativity scene in the cafeteria of a public office building
 - 15% oppose a Star of David memorial to Holocaust victims in a public park
- When asked which of the following activities they considered constitutionally protected, respondents displayed a range of interpretation (they are all protected):
 - 20% believe that wearing religious garb or symbols in public is *not* protected
 - 22% believe the broadcast of religious services over the public airwaves is *not* protected

- 48% believe that we are *not* allowed to solicit donations in a public place to support a particular religion
- 50% believe that going door to door to seek converts to a particular religion is *not* protected

Despite these inconsistencies, an overwhelming number of those surveyed conveyed an appreciation of the nation's religious diversity. When asked whether the United States would be better off if everyone practiced the same religion, only one in 10 answered in the affirmative.

"Americans overwhelmingly profess appreciation for the nation's religious diversity, but that appreciation is strongest in the abstract," Baer said. "Scratch beneath the surface, as this survey does, and we find pockets of religious intolerance. This inconsistency, especially at a time in the world when religious differences are at a fever pitch, underscores the need for education about religious liberty, which is the principal mission of the Council for America's First Freedom."

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Survey Methodology

The survey was conducted by telephone by the Opinion Research Corporation, which polled 1,000 Americans (500 men/500 women) by telephone between July 28 and 31, 2005. The results have a margin of error of +/- 5 percent.

About the Council for America's First Freedom

The Council for America's First Freedom is a 501(c)(3) organization based in Richmond, Va. that provides educational programs, materials and information about religious freedom as an American historical development, as a contemporary controversy, and as an international human right. Currently, the Council is developing the First Freedom Center, a world-class facility that will offer a dynamic visitor experience with state-of-the-art interactive exhibits exploring the development of religious freedom in America, and today's related national and international issues. The Council also sponsors the Presidential Proclamation of National Religious Freedom Day (January), First Freedom Awards, and the First Freedom Student Competition. For more information, please visit www.firstfreedom.org.

(complete survey results follow)

2005 Council for America's First Freedom Survey Results

- 1) Which of the following Constitutional guarantees is the most important to you and your family?
 - a. Freedom of speech (**49%**)
 - b. Freedom of religion (**31%**)
 - c. The right to bear arms (**11%**)
 - d. Freedom of the press (**3%**)
 - e. Freedom of assembly (**1%**)
 - f. Don't know (**4%**)

- 2) The First Amendment right of Freedom of Religion is
 - a. As important today as it was when the Constitution was first ratified (**38%**)
 - b. Not as important today as it was then (**20%**)
 - c. More important today than it was then (**39%**)
 - d. Don't know (**3%**)

- 3) As a matter of foreign policy, the U.S. government should
 - a. Let other countries determine for themselves whether or not to guarantee freedom of religion (**66%**)
 - b. Actively advance the principle of religious liberty around the world (**26%**)
 - c. Don't know (**7%**)

- 4) With regard to separation of church and state, which of the following statements most reflects your point of view?
 - a. The separation of church and state has become too severe and needs to be less strictly interpreted (**27%**)
 - b. It is important to keep our tradition of separation of government and religion (**47%**)
 - c. There is really no need to separate church and state (**23%**)
 - d. Don't know or none of the above (**4%**)

- 5) Which of the following would you oppose? (You may choose more than one.)
 - a. The posting of the Ten Commandments in the lobby of a public courthouse (**21%**)
 - b. The display of a nativity scene in the cafeteria of a public office building (**19%**)
 - c. Star of David memorial to Holocaust victims in a public park (**15%**)
 - d. None of the above (**54%**)
 - e. Don't know (**2%**)

- 6) Thinking about the issue of religion in public school, which of the following would you support? (You may choose more than one.)
- a. Designated time *after* school to pray to pray aloud, alone or in groups (**66%**)
 - b. Designated time for silent prayer in school (**66%**)
 - c. Designated time *during* the school day to pray aloud, alone or in groups (**54%**)
 - d. None of the above (**15%**)
 - e. Don't know (**1%**)
- 7) Do you think it is okay to teach about the world's religions in public schools?
- a. Yes (**81%**)
 - b. No (**16%**)
 - c. Don't know (**3%**)
- 8) A public school teacher wants to read an excerpt from a sacred text as part of the class's study on the role of religion in America. Which of the following do you think is permissible?
- a. Excerpts from the New Testament in a class on Christianity (**81%**)
 - b. Excerpts from the Old Testament in a class on Judaism (**73%**)
 - c. Excerpts from an ancient Hindu text in a class on Indian Americans (**72%**)
 - d. Excerpts from the Koran in a class on Arab-Americans (**68%**)
 - e. None of the above (**12%**)
 - f. Don't know (**3%**)
- 9) In addition to your right to practice religion as you see fit, which of the following activities do you believe is protected by the constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion?
- a. The wearing of religious garb or symbols in public (**80%**)
 - b. The broadcast of religious services over the public airwaves (**78%**)
 - c. Soliciting donations to support your religion in public places (**52%**)
 - d. Going door to door to seek converts to your religion (**50%**)
 - e. None of the above (**7%**)
 - f. Don't know (**2%**)
- 10) Do you agree or disagree with this statement: the United States would be better off if everyone practiced the same religion?
- a. Agree (**10%**)
 - b. Disagree (**87%**)
 - c. Don't know (**3%**)

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