

Louisiana Issues Guidelines for Free Speech in Schools

NEW ORLEANS, LA - Louisiana Attorney General Jeff Landry and U.S. Congressman Mike Johnson released a 15-page document as a valuable resource regarding the religious and free speech rights of students in public schools.

The "Louisiana Student Rights Review: Answers to Common Questions about Religious

Freedom in Schools," provide answers to 26 "frequently asked questions" regarding issues such as student-led prayer and when students can pray. The document also references cited court cases and Child Evangelism Fellowship's Good News Clubs. Liberty Counsel represents Child Evangelism Fellowship nationally and has never lost a case at any court of final resort

regarding the Good News Clubs.

The released guidelines, which Congressman Johnson and Attorney General Landry plan on mailing to every school superintendent in Louisiana, also state prayers at athletic events are permitted when school officials are not involved and student-led, student-initiated prayers must also be

allowed at graduations. Congressman Johnson stated the Constitution and laws protect the rights of students to "live out their faith on campus. Religious liberty is the first freedom listed in the Bill of Rights, and the next generation of Americans needs to be encouraged to help preserve it." "We hope this publication helps all citizens better understand religious liberty because too

many people have unfortunately been misled into believing schools must be religion-free zones. The truth is our First Amendment rights are not surrendered at the schoolhouse door," said Landry.

Liberty Counsel's Founder and Chairman Mat Staver said, "Students may exercise their constitutional rights to religious free speech while on public

school campuses during non-instructional times. They do not give up those rights just because they are in a public school. I commend Attorney General Jeff Landry and Congressman Mike Johnson for releasing these valuable guidelines. The guidelines are an excellent educational resource that every public school in the nation should have."

Court Strikes Baltimore Forced Abortion Speech Law

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND - Today, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals struck down a Baltimore City Ordinance seeking to impose notification requirements on unlicensed pregnancy centers. The ordinance compelled these pregnancy resource centers to post notices that conspicuously state in English and Spanish that they do not provide nor refer women for abortions or birth control services.

The Fourth Circuit found that the ordinance violates the free

speech clause of the First Amendment. In contrast to decisions by the Ninth Circuit which validated a similar law in California, the Fourth Circuit found that the Baltimore ordinance was not commercial or professional speech. The court said, "The compelled speech at issue here raises particularly troubling First Amendment concerns. At bottom, the disclaimer portrays abortion as one among a menu of morally equivalent choices. While that may be the city's view, it is not the center's."

The court also found that the ordinance represented an impermissible attempt by the City of Baltimore "to use compelled speech as a weapon to run its ideological foes into the ground," which risks grave violation of the country's most cherished freedoms.

Similarly, Liberty Counsel represents three pro-life crisis pregnancy centers in Southern California, all of which offer women experiencing crisis pregnancies resources, counseling, advice and alternatives to abortion. The Supreme

Court has agreed to hear National Institute of Family and Life Advocates (NIFLA) v. Becerra, one of four cases brought by crisis pregnancy centers challenging the law as a violation of the First Amendment guarantees of free speech and free exercise of religion. The ruling on the

NIFLA case will apply to the other pending cases.

"The Baltimore City Ordinance which forced crisis pregnancy centers to speak a message that goes directly against their religious beliefs and mission to save lives is unconstitutional," said Mat Staver, Founder and Chairman of Liberty Counsel.

"The First Amendment protects the right to speak and the right not to speak. This unbelievable government mandate forced pregnancy help centers and staff to be puppets of the government and channel the state's abortion message," said Staver.

MANCHIN APPLAUDS PRESIDENT TRUMP EXECUTIVE ORDER ON CRITICAL MINERALS

Washington, D.C. - U.S. Senator Joe Manchin (D-WV) applauded President Trump for issuing an executive order to identify new sources of critical minerals - also known as rare earth elements - in the United States. Senator Manchin introduced the Rare Earth Element Advanced Coal Technologies Act (REEACT Act) in July to ensure the Department of Energy (DOE) office of Fossil Energy continues this important program, and authorizes an annual appropriation of \$20 million per year through 2025.

"I am pleased that President Trump recognizes the vulnerability caused by our reliance on foreign imports of critical minerals," Senator Manchin said. "The National Energy Technology Laboratory in Morgantown has worked to develop a domestic supply of critical minerals from coal and coal byproducts since 2011, and I look forward to working with President Trump to continue this important research that will protect our national security interests, and also help to give a much needed boost to coal country."

Earlier this month, DOE announced that coal samples collected from several basins nationwide, spanning the entire coal supply chain, were found to contain high concentrations of rare earth elements (REE), a promising sign to the successful commercialization of coal separation technologies.

Senator Manchin's REEACT Act will ensure DOE and its partners continue vital research into developing and commercializing the technology for domestic production of REEs from coal and coal byproducts - a critical step toward re-establishing a U.S. domestic supply for these products that will make our nation less vulnerable to potential supply disruptions.

SORRY IS MORE THAN JUST A WORD: SHOW THAT YOU MEAN IT

By Ray Pennings

It's traditional to head into a new year full of resolve fuelled by last year's regret.

Our commitment to renewed discipline, diets and dream-achieving over the coming 12 months is all too often driven by short-term overindulgence during Christmas festivities.

More importantly, there's a lingering sense of another year lost by not doing what we ought to have done, and by doing what we ought not to have done, in the fine, ancient words of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer.

As much as we are impelled to improve, many of us also feel that apology and forgiveness, to ourselves and to others, is justified and beneficial. Unfortunately, we repeatedly forget that sorry is more than just a word. Contrition that's merely on the lips changes nothing in the heart or, for that matter, around the waistline, within the workplace, inside troubled relationships.

Before we invest in hope of much-needed renewal, it's worth doing some due diligence on what saying sorry really means, when it can be accepted as closing a matter, and how it can truly move us to the new by letting us leave old regrets in God's hands.

We can all think of examples in the public and private aspects of our lives. Three that come to mind:

We learn that someone we know, esteemed and trusted, has been trash-talking us or even engaging in vicious bad-mouthing and rumour mongering. Confronted privately, the person acknowledges the comments were half-truths, but seems to think a private "I'm

sorry" fixes the matter, with no need to retract the falsehoods.

The life of someone we considered solid and reliable, measured and trustworthy abruptly blows apart in revelations of marital infidelity, sexual misconduct, legal impropriety or damaging dereliction of responsibility. Yet the person responsible seems to expect friends to rally around in support on the basis of "I'm sorry," regardless of the legal, social or moral consequences of the behaviour.

A public official seriously transgresses codes of ethics or even the law. Caught and judged culpable, the miscreant stumbles through a public "I'm sorry if I offended anyone" non-apology, promises to do better in future, and implies that because it was done for country, party or ideology, everyone will understand, and all should be forgiven and forgotten.

All three are occasions when "I'm sorry" comes from the lips, but we simply doesn't resolve the core problems. So how do we distinguish the passed-off apology from authentic remorse?

As a person of faith, I believe in forgiveness. Presumably, I should be among the first to accept words of contrition. My identity is that of a forgiven sinner. I like giving people multiple chances, in part because I know that I mess up plenty and need them myself.

But contrition requires more than formula.

I can't judge motives or thought. For all I know, what I experience might involve sincere, heartfelt contrition. On the other hand, there's equal evidence to believe what's offered are mere butt-covering

words from those who've been caught and are looking to bury uncomfortable episodes.

Plausibility requires both words and behaviour, even the passage of time, and visible evidence of changed behaviour. It requires the person seeking forgiveness to acknowledge the damage to others that their misdeeds have done.

It's been said that both justice and change have three parts: regret, restitution and rehabilitation. To honestly realize what was done was wrong, to undo the damage and restore things as best as possible, and to live in a manner that shows that the mistakes of the past are part of former ways and the lessons of our mistakes have been learned - it's all part of saying I'm sorry.

Regrets? We've all had a few.

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