Arizona Republicans Propose Bill That Would Not Allow Atheists To Graduate High School

January 25, 2013 By Hemant Mehta 1,335 Comments

A group of Arizona politicians — all Republicans, of course — have proposed a law (House Bill 2467) requiring public high school students to recite the following oath in order to graduate:

I, ________, do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge these duties; So help me God.

To quote Comedy Central’s Ilya Gerner: “Nothing says ‘I take this obligation freely’ quite like a state law that withholds your diploma unless you swear an oath.”

Kevin Bondelli adds:

... graduating high school is not the same thing as voluntarily accepting the responsibility of a public office or admission to the legal bar. A high school diploma is, with extremely few exceptions, required to have a chance to live above the poverty level. It is the culmination of an education that up until that point was compulsory.

It’s bad enough the Republicans are demanding loyalty of the kind normally reserved for...
members of Congress and beyond — but there's also no way I would say those last four words, and the current text of the legislation does not allow for any alternatives.

**In other words, if this bill were to become a law, atheists would either not be allowed to graduate... or they would be forced to lie so they could graduate. Neither option is acceptable.**

Mike Sunnucks of the Phoenix Business Journal points out another problem:

The Arizona bill could also face legal challenges if it is approved.

Jehovah’s witnesses, some Muslims and pacifist Quakers have in the past challenged loyalty oaths imposed by the federal government and other agencies, saying they conflict with their beliefs and religious professions. Similarly, some Arizona students could challenge the proposed high school oath as a violation of their religious liberties and freedom of expression.

This bill is the work of Representatives Bob Thorpe, Sonny Borrelli, Carl Seel, Shope, Jeff Dial, David Livingston, Chester Crandell, and Steve Smith.

Smith and Shope have also introduced legislation demanding that all students in grade 12 recite the Pledge of Allegiance (with “Under God”) every day. At least in that bill, students can get out of saying it with their parents’ permission.

No such exemption exists in the Loyalty Oath.

Keep in mind that in both cases, the bills do not help children get a better education. That’s the saddest thing about all this. The people who are in charge of fixing the education crisis are proposing solutions that would only waste more classroom time and exclude students from graduating despite fulfilling their current requirements.

***Update***: While the bill still includes the God language, Think Progress reports that it may be revised:

As written, the bill does not exempt atheist students or those of different faiths from the requirement, though Thorpe has pledged to amend the measure. “In that we had a tight deadline for dropping our bills, I was not able to update the language,” he wrote in an e-mail to the Arizona Republic. “Even though I want to encourage all of our students to understand and respect our Constitution and constitutional form of government, I do not want to create a requirement that students or parents may feel uncomfortable with.”

So it’s possible alternative language may solve the atheist problem, but *requiring* students to take the oath still poses a host of constitutional issues. Another option would be to make the oath optional, but that would make this bill completely irrelevant.

Which would be fine by me.

(Thanks to Brian for the link)
About Hemant Mehta
Hemant Mehta is the chair of Foundation Beyond Belief and a high school math teacher in the suburbs of Chicago. He began writing the Friendly Atheist blog in 2006. His latest book is called The Young Atheist's Survival Guide.
Reminds me of the Stewart line about Reince's consonants:
RNC PR BS.
And to think, not one person ran against the guy most responsible for the GOP losses in Nov. The party is dying. Finally.

That's incorrect. He did have a challenger from Maine, but he didn't get enough support from party leaders to be put on the ballot.

Hi again, Kevin. Fancy meeting you here.

How did you get here?

Kevin of Bangor? Hi I'm David of Bangor. Are you Kevin Quimby?

Bangor, ME?? In that case I'm Tony of Bangor! (West side)

I am Kathy of Machias...so weird, 'cause I got here when this was shared by a friend from Georgia who got it from his friend, also not in Maine. I was in Bangor last night.

Is the Machias you speak of in Maine? I only ask
because I lived in Machias, Washington.

Kevin Of Bangor → Tony of Bangor • 3 months ago
Yuppers, in Maine and I’m closer to downtown.

Kevin Of Bangor → David • 3 months ago
I’m a Kevin but not a Quimby.

BetelgeuseA → Earthling3 • 3 months ago
I am Linda of Betelgeuse .. just visiting .. Hello fellow star travellers :D

Flash Kellish → Kevin Of Bangor • 3 months ago
"Bangor"? as in Maine?

Chuck → Flash Kellish • 3 months ago
Bangor? Oooh, I do love me some Sea Dog!

Kevin Of Bangor → Chuck • 3 months ago
I can walk there.

Chuck → Kevin Of Bangor • 3 months ago
When I worked at BAC, I lived in Penobscot Square in Brewer, and then on Palm Street in Bangor. I walked to the Dog from each location many, many times. Man, did they have a good but expensive lobster roll....

Kevin Of Bangor → Chuck • 3 months ago
Are you no longer in Maine?

Chuck → Kevin Of Bangor • 3 months ago
Yes, that is the sad truth. I grew up in Oakland, but then went to college in Houston. Then I moved to Brewer, but had to leave for work in 2003. Now I am back here in Houston. Good food, but politics and religion not to my liking.

Kevin Of Bangor → Flash Kellish • 3 months ago
Yes, as Maine.

Greg Eatoff → David McNett (Nugget) • 3 months ago
Mr. McNett, You win the internet.
Arizona Republicans Propose Bill That Would Not Allow Atheists To Graduate High School

boo  Greg Eatoff  •  3 months ago
all your internet belong to us
14  Reply  Share

Jehanne  boo  •  3 months ago
all your internet are belong to us
21  Reply  Share

Ronlawhouston  David McNett (Nugget)  •  3 months ago
Yes, please, please can I steal this?
90  Reply  Share

Banasidhe  David McNett (Nugget)  •  3 months ago
Can I use this as the quote, to go with this link, when I tweet this?
Priceless! lmao
41  Reply  Share

Raven  Banasidhe  •  3 months ago
I love that i find you everywhere.
1  Reply  Share

handsomejack47  David McNett (Nugget)  •  3 months ago
See, it’s the crazy state politicians in Phoenix that are making all of us look bad. Tucson is not that crazy, I can guarantee you that.
38  Reply  Share

RK  handsomejack47  •  3 months ago
The demographics of this state are slowly changing. As the the crazy far right Rs alienate moderate conservatives, libertarian leaning Republicans and even highly conservative people with actual principles, the population is slowly moving more liberal here. Arizona’s days as a red state are numbered, and what we’re witnessing here is the last-ditch death rattle of the dinosaurs as they lumber into their tar pits. It will get worse, and then suddenly, it will get much better.
81  Reply  Share

Perry Levin  RK  •  3 months ago
I really hope that is true. I was stationed in Tucson in the late 60s and liked the beautiful scenery. Too bad Teapublicans are alienating people so they will not visit.
26  Reply  Share

Virginia Trujillo  RK  •  3 months ago
"the last-ditch death rattle of the dinosaurs as they lumber into their tar pits" LMAO!
I live in AZ. I think the only reason we still have Republicans in office right now is because of all the out of state money that has been being funneled in from other states. There is no way Arpaio should have won last time. The elections are being bought by people that don’t even reside here.
17  Reply  Share

KateSeraSera  Virginia Trujillo  •  3 months ago
That is really true Virginia. I don’t know anyone that
That is really true Virginia. I don't know anyone that voted for Joe, knowing how incredibly insane he is. It's the outside money that is fueling the Jan Brewer, Arapaio, and Jeff Flake who is truly an idiot. I think all these people landed from outer space, they are that alien.

Unfortunately that is how we too often change; we must wait for death to occur. Sad

I was a Reagan Republican, and he wouldn't recognize the twisted Neo-fascist train wreck his party has become, let alone approve.

That's quite optimistic, but it would be nice to see.

Completely agree.

Great msg, RK. I'm still grinnin at the alliteration you used.

I've lived in Arizona most of my adult life. All over the state. Phoenix, Prescott, and some small towns like St. Johns, Williams, Dewey, Mayer. They all have their own, sometimes odd, characteristics. For example St. Johns had a heavy population of Mormons and native Americans (everyone seemed to have one of two last names - Patterson or Chavez). But it wasn't until I got to Tucson that I experienced an actual sense of community. As a military brat, I never experienced that growing up. I can see now why so many place so much importance on it. While we have fewer in the way of right wing nutjobs, they do exist.

will you take an oath, just saying... LOL

We have the same problem in Michigan. Ann Arbor is not like the rest of the state, but... still subject to the same insane Michigan laws, unfortunately. Sigh.

Michigan for the most part has always been run by
the Unions and the Democrats who have made most of the laws. I've lived here all my life, I know. And And Arbor thinking their any differrent than the rest of the state are just those rose colored glasses you're wearing.

EllenBeth Wachs ➔ David McNett (Nugget) · 3 months ago
One republican from Arizona down voted your comment, hah!

Xorlaryn ➔ EllenBeth Wachs · 3 months ago
That's because only one knows how. (One of their Liberal children had to have shown them how to use the internet.)

Joseph Slabaugh ➔ Xorlaryn · 3 months ago
Im from Ohio, and I am a Libertarian, and I am downvoting your comment, as not all geeks are socialists.

That said, I do agree that this law is not something that I would support either.

PMCM ➔ Joseph Slabaugh · 3 months ago
...and there are many different types of socialists, the classical sense (the one you are referring to) much more extreme than most liberals that you will meet. Oh, I forgot, FOX News teaches people to think that Liberal = Socialist = Communist = Dictator. Seeing as we have people like these idiots in charge of education in some states, no wonder it's so easy for FOX News and maniacs like Rush Limbaugh to brainwash the masses.

bobthechef ➔ PMCM · 3 months ago
FOX News may be bullshit, but frankly, socialism and communism were interchangeable terms during the Cold War (although those socialist or really quasi-socialist countries outside of the Soviet axis managed to avoid the association with communism), and Marx does name communism as socialism's successor in his historical materialism. And in the terms were used interchangeably in the 19th century. And in many cases, socialism did mean dictatorship, whether it was the dictatorship of a single man or that of a party or whatever form it may take. I dislike the smarminess of Republicans as much as the next guy, but neoliberals are a bunch of childish loons. The pot calling the kettle black, really.

PhiloKGB ➔ bobthechef · 3 months ago
You've obviously read Marx, so you must know that the historical implementations of socialism/communism did not exactly go according to his model.