

## **Identifying the Problem**

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When Francis Bellamy originally wrote the Pledge of Allegiance in 1892, he wrote it so that any person, practicing any religion, and living in any country could repeat it. Originally the pledge read: “I pledge allegiance to my flag and the Republic for which it stands, one nation indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

The first major change to the pledge took place on June 14, Flag Day, 1924. The change consisted of replacing “my flag” with “the flag of the United States of America.” The next and most recent change to the pledge was in 1954. The words “under God” were added because the religious leaders from the Knights of Columbus, a Catholic organization, were afraid that the pledge was too similar to the pledges said by the “godless communists.”

Our problem is that the Pledge of Allegiance includes the phrase “under God.” These two words have a huge impact on many people in Vermont and America. Many would argue that the constitution says if you don’t believe in “God,” then you shouldn’t be compelled to say “under God.” Children in public schools are put in a difficult situation because of peer pressure. Even adults could suffer social stigmas if they refuse to say the pledge of allegiance because of their religious views. An example of this is how in the VT State House David Zuckerman, chair of the House Agricultural Committee, shared with us that he doesn’t say the pledge because of what he believes in.

Depending on where you are in the United States, the public schools of your state may have a requirement to say the pledge every day, like Virginia, Wisconsin and Alabama. Some public schools even require students to stand up while saying the pledge, like New Hampshire.

One of the organizations that believes in removing “under God” from the Pledge of Allegiance is the American Civil Liberties Union. It believes this is because of the free exercise clause of the First Amendment that states, “Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion.” The disadvantage of their position is that a lot of people disagree with their interpretation of the first amendment.

An opposing view is that “under God” is a generic statement and doesn’t support a specific religion. In response to that, we would have to say that “God” does support a specific religion, Christianity. All religions have gods, but they speak and write of them in different ways, unlike Christianity. People who practice Judaism write “G-d,” those who practice Islam use “The Father” (*Allah*), and Deism believes that god is spelled with a lowercase “g.” Some religions like Paganism, Shamanism, Wicca and other similar religions use “goddess” or “Mother Earth,” and Hinduism uses “gods.” All of those religions do not use “God.” Only Christians use the monotheists “God,” so the pledge does support a specific religion, Christianity.

Some also believe that taking away “under God” is taking away the religious rights of Christians, but how can that be so? Not saying the pledge doesn’t prevent them from praying to or worshiping their God. Another argument would be that the phrase “under God” has lost its spiritual impact. According to Eric Buelhman, VT Senator Jim Jeffords’ lawyer, the pledge is said so much that people just say it like a song, out of memory.

In conclusion, we believe that to include “under god” in the pledge of allegiance is unconstitutional, wrong and a violation of the rights of all American citizens. It goes against the principles of our founding fathers:

“We must unite in common efforts for the common good. All too will bear mind this sacred principle, that though the will of the majority is in all cases to prevail, that will, to be rightful, must be reasonable, that the minority possess their equal rights, which equal laws must protect and to violate would be oppression.”

~Thomas Jefferson, Inaugural Speech (May 4, 1801)