



KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS

FACT SHEET



The Pledge of Allegiance

The Knights of Columbus was the leading proponent of the 1954 addition of the words “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance.

U.S. Knights began including the words “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance in 1951 after the organization’s board of directors adopted a resolution mandating that the amended pledge be formally recited in each of its 750 Fourth Degree assemblies. A year later, the Supreme Council adopted a resolution that urged Congress and the White House to add the words “under God” to the Pledge. Supreme Knight Luke Hart, who was also president of the National Fraternal Congress, persuaded the other 110 fraternal societies to support the resolution as well.

The Pledge of Allegiance was formally amended by Congress and signed into law by President Dwight Eisenhower on Flag Day, June 14, 1954. In a letter following the action, President Eisenhower thanked Supreme Knight Hart for the K of C’s work in making the addition of the words “under God,” to the Pledge a reality.

Today the Order is directly involved in defending the Pledge against the most recent legal challenges to its constitutionality.

In 2005, atheist Michael Newdow, whose earlier lawsuit had been rejected by the U.S. Supreme Court because he lacked standing, filed a new challenge with a number of co-plaintiffs. He asked the U.S. District Court in Sacramento, CA to declare the Pledge unconstitutional because it contains the words “under God.” The Knights of Columbus and seven individual Knights and their families sought and were granted permission to join the suit as defendant-intervenors. In 2006, the District Court ruled against the Pledge, and the Knights immediately appealed the decision to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. Oral arguments in the case were heard by a panel of the Ninth Circuit in San Francisco on Tuesday, December 4, 2007. **On March 11, 2010, the court issued a decision upholding the constitutionality of the Pledge, and ruling that the words under God “do not violate the Establishment Clause.”**

On October 31, 2007, Newdow filed a similar lawsuit against the school system in Hanover, New Hampshire, this time on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation and several local plaintiffs. Once again, the Knights of Columbus sought and received permission from the court to become defendant-intervenors. On September 30, 2009, U.S. District Judge Steven McAuliffe ruled that the Pledge of Allegiance - including the words “under God” - did not violate the Constitution, and dismissed the case. Judge McAuliffe held that the Pledge “neither advances nor inhibits religion” and “does not foster excessive government involvement with religion.” It was, he said, “enacted to enhance instruction in the Nation’s history, and foster a sense of patriotism.” Newdow has appealed to the First Circuit.



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