

JOHN W. I

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60 Pound Ridge Road • Cheshire, CT 06410-3412 • USA
Tel 203-272-2151 • E-mail JWhite8011@aol.com

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF CONNECTICUT
REGARDING SENATE BILL 406—"AN ACT CONCERNING THE DISPLAY
OF THE CONSTITUTION AND THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE"

I am John White and I reside at 60 Pound Ridge Road, Cheshire. I am here to speak in support of Raised Senate Bill 406, "An Act Concerning the Display of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence." In fact, I am the person who initiated this bill. I want to tell you how it came about, and why.

In 2005 I proposed to the Cheshire Board of Education that it post copies of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution in entryways of all public schools in town. After some deliberation, the Board accepted my proposal and took action. The Superintendent ordered copies from the National Archives (www.archives.gov). Now, all seven public schools in Cheshire have framed life-size reproductions of the two founding documents of our nation on display for all to see as they enter the schools.

A local newspaper wrote about the matter, mentioning my role in it, and soon I got several calls from people outside Cheshire saying they were going to propose the same thing to their school boards. One person said it ought to be done statewide.

That comment immediately seemed right and proper, so I followed up on it. I contacted my representative to the General Assembly, Representative Al Adinolfi. He, too, felt it was a good idea and in March 2007 sent a letter to Senator Tom Gaffey and Representative Andrew Fleischman of the Education Committee requesting a bill such as we are considering here. Rep. Adinolfi said in his letter, "I believe such legislation would teach and remind students how important the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are to the quality and function of our lives."

However, it was too late in the session to move on the idea, so I asked Sen. Gaffey to bring it up this year. He did, and that is how we came to be discussing this today.

Now, why did I originally propose the idea? The answer to that is the rest of what I have to say to you now.

First, I am especially concerned with youth education. Young people are 20% of the population but 100% of the future. If young people do not understand and appreciate the fundamentals of America, in a few generations there won't be an America. It is as simple as that.

Second, America is an unfinished experiment in self-government which had never been tried before in all of history. We went to war to establish it. Today, the War for Independence is over but the American Revolution goes on because it is a spiritual revolution of global significance. Never before had a nation been consciously founded on the spiritual principles of liberty, equality and inalienable rights. We were the first.

The Declaration of Independence is therefore not only a political document. It is also a spiritual document. There are four references to God in the Declaration of Independence. They are: nature's God, Creator, Supreme Judge of the world, and Divine Providence. Taken together, those references to deity make clear that our Founders saw God, not government, as the source of our freedom, our sovereignty, our rights, our justice and our human dignity. That is why we are, and have been from the beginning, one nation under God.

The Declaration of Independence stated the principles of enlightened self-government. The Constitution provided the architecture of enlightened self-government. The Declaration of Independence provides the theory; the Constitution provides the practice. Together, they assure the conditions by which the blessings of liberty are made available to us and our posterity.

However, the hard-won freedom and rights which our Founders obtained for us can only be safeguarded by an electorate which understand the theory and practice of enlightened self-government and acts upon it. That understanding must be passed from generation to generation. By having schools display the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution in their entryways, we citizens of Connecticut will be saying to everyone who comes into those schools: "This is what we stand for in educating our children. This is the basis of our society and our government. These founding documents present the ideals, principles and values on which we live our lives. And we proudly display them for all who enter, urging everyone—students, faculty, parents and visitors—to take those ideals, principles and values into their minds and hearts so that this most wonderful and blessed nation may continue to advance the liberty and rights of the individual in a self-governing society."

American society is being severely tested today. Opposing groups and factions argue over what is important and how we should proceed in the life of our nation. Much of it is hateful harangue—diatribe, not debate—which is destroying our national unity. By directing the public's attention to the fundamental statements which created America, by urging the public to reflect on what the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution say and mean by their words, we will be taking a step in the direction of restoring allegiance to the America intended by our Founders—the America of ordered liberty, hope and opportunity which has done more good for the common person than anything else in history.

If we do this now, we will be leading the nation and will be living up to our nickname, the Constitution State. Toward that end, I have already proposed to my congressman, Representative Chris Murphy, to introduce a resolution in the Congress urging public schools to display the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution as we are considering here.

Therefore, I suggest two revisions to the bill. First, revise the order of the document names to reflect their historical sequence so that the Declaration of Independence is named before the Constitution. Second, revise proposed Section 1(d) to read "Each local and regional school board of education shall provide a life-size or poster-size copy of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States under the board's jurisdiction and shall cause such copies to be permanently displayed in the entryways of each school."

Thank you for your attention.