



Ethical Action Report



A joint publication of the American Ethical Union and the American Humanist Association

Number 12-06

December 2006

In this issue:

Reproductive Freedom: Protect America's Family Planning

Separation of Church and State: Oppose the Public Expression of Religion Act

Work Against Genocide: Help Move Peacekeepers into Sudan

Oppose Unconstitutional Powers: End Presidential Signing Statements

The *Ethical Action Report* doesn't represent the views of the Ethical Action Office of the American Ethical Union or the American Humanist Association. The American Ethical Union takes ethical positions on public affairs only through resolutions adopted by its Assembly or Board. Past AEU resolutions are available, searchable by date or topic at: www.ethicalaction.org/aeuresolutions.

Reproductive Freedom: Protect America's Family Planning

The Federal Office of Population Affairs oversees federally funded teen pregnancy, family planning, and abstinence programs. It has long been considered a hallmark of quality preventative care, providing family planning services to approximately 5 million low-income people a year. However, this program has recently come under serious threat.

BACKGROUND

President George W. Bush has just appointed Dr. Eric Keroack to oversee the Title X family-planning program of the Office of Population Affairs. Dr. Keroack is the wrong person for this job. He currently is medical director of A Woman's Concern, a Massachusetts-based Christian nonprofit, which offers pregnancy testing, ultrasounds, and counseling. It also promotes abstinence until marriage and opposes contraception, arguing that it is "demeaning to women, degrading of human sexuality, and adverse to human health and happiness." A Woman's Concern also gives out false health information; for example, that condoms "offer virtually no protection"

against STDs. Dr. Keroack himself has also asserted that premarital sex disrupts brain chemistry, which creates a physiological barrier to a happy marriage, an unfounded claim that amounts to nothing but pseudoscience.

ACTION

Dr. Keroack should not be entrusted with the health of millions of American women. Please act now and urge Secretary of Health and Human Services, Michael Leavitt, to reconsider the appointment of Dr. Keroack as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Population Affairs. Direct mail to:

Michael Leavitt, Secretary of Health and Human Services
The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Separation of Church and State: Oppose the Public Expression of Religion Act

The Public Expression of Religion Act of 2005 (H.R. 2679) would bar courts from awarding attorney's fees to prevailing parties bringing suit under the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. If passed, PERA would severely discourage or outlaw litigation over government practices that violate the First Amendment, and would prevent concerned citizens from exercising their constitutionally protected rights in court. PERA passed in the U.S. House in September by a vote of 244-173. Now we need your help to make sure that a "lame duck" Congress doesn't rush it through the Senate.

BACKGROUND

PERA purports to "eliminate the chilling effect on the constitutionally protected expression of religion by state and local officials that results from the threat that potential litigants may seek damages and attorney's fees." However, these litigants are only awarded attorney's fees if their claims are found valid and thus government officials have acted unconstitutionally.

The threat of lawsuits under the Establishment Clause does not and never has had a "chilling effect" on religious practices; religion is an integral part of many Americans' lives and personal expression of religion is not under threat. But government sanctioned religion infringes on First Amendment rights. The current laws support a system of checks and balances to ensure that the separation of church and state is respected and that all Americans have the freedom to express themselves without coercion.

ACTION

Call your Senators and urge them to oppose a "lame duck" vote on the Public Expression of Religion Act.

Work Against Genocide: Help Move Peacekeepers into Sudan

Despite ceasefire agreements signed in 2004 and 2005, and the recent Darfur Peace Agreement, attacks on civilians still continue in Darfur (West Sudan). An estimated 500,000 people have died in the continuing conflict and more than 4 million people need humanitarian intervention.

BACKGROUND

The crisis began in 2003 when the Sudanese government, after a rebel African group attacked police stations and military outposts, armed and organized a brutal militia known as the Janjaweed to attack and displace thousands of the African tribes in Darfur. This militia and other groups have executed men and boys, systematically raped women and girls, destroyed crops and poisoned water supplies, and forcibly recruited children. As many as 450,000 people have died in the crisis and more than 2 million are homeless. About 2,000 villages have been destroyed. The U.N. believes the aim is to wipe out whole African tribes.

Currently, the Sudanese government has only allowed African Union troops into the region. However, only 7,000 of those troops are now in the region, whereas a U.N. resolution passed in August called for as many as 22,500. Moreover, AU troops are woefully ill equipped. We must get U.N. troops into Darfur now!

ACTION

Write a Letter to the Editor for your community newspaper and demand that the United Nations accelerate its efforts to get peacekeeping troops into Darfur.

Oppose Unconstitutional Powers: End Presidential Signing Statements

When a president of the United States signs a bill into law, he has an option to add a “signing statement,” a comment or interpretation that has traditionally been regarded as advisory. But President George W. Bush has issued over 800 signing statements since 2001, and the judicial branch is showing signs of willingness to accept these statements as law. Bush’s total surpasses the number of signing statements issued by all U.S. presidents since the founding of this country.

BACKGROUND

The details that Bush has found “unacceptable” and instructed government agency officials to ignore always concern limits to executive power. But these laws he tampers with are those that members of Congress have crafted after months of research and bipartisan negotiation. For them to be gutted with a few strokes of a president’s pen allows autocracy to trump democracy.

ACTION

Call your senators and tell them that U.S. presidents aren’t entitled to the powers of dictators. Urge them to vote yes on Bill 3721 IS.

Contacting Elected Officials

White House

Mailing Address

The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Phone Number

Comments: (202) 456-1111
Fax: (202) 456-2461

E-mail

President George W. Bush:
president@whitehouse.gov

Vice President Richard Cheney:
vice.president@whitehouse.gov

Congress

Mailing Address

United States Senate

or

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Phone Number

Capitol Switchboard: (202) 224-3121

E-mail

Visit <http://www.senate.gov> or
<http://www.house.gov> to use your
representatives' e-mail contact forms.

American Ethical Union ▪ 2 West 64th Street ▪ New York, NY 10023

American Humanist Association ▪ 1777 T Street, NW ▪ Washington, DC 20009

Editor: Karen Frantz (800) 837-3792
report@americanhumanist.org