

'God' motto urged at Whitman County courthouse

Whitman commissioners debate it, but table any decision

Anthony Kuipers, Moscow-Pullman Daily News

A spirited discussion embroiled the Whitman County Commissioners on Monday about whether to display the national motto, "In God We Trust," in their chambers at the courthouse.

Earlier this month, the commissioners received a request to do so by In God We Trust-America, a volunteer organization in California that encourages elected officials to approve such displays.

Their agenda had included a resolution to recognize the motto in their chambers. During their regular weekly workshop Monday morning, however, they decided to strike the item from the agenda after commissioners Dean Kinzer and Michael Largent couldn't agree on a course of action.

Kinzer supported the resolution. He said it is within their First Amendment right to display the national motto, and he supports the organization's actions to keep the name of God from being "ostracized."

He addressed potential concerns about the separation of church and state by reminding the commissioners the country's founding documents "quote the word of God," and the motto is used on U.S. currency.

"I don't see a good reason not to support it," Kinzer said.

Largent said even as a Christian, he found the action item "problematic" and said he had difficulty understanding what it would accomplish.

Largent said he's heard "no request from constituents that we should take action on the national motto," and he takes issue with the county taking a role in this organization's agenda.

"We're trying to take a national debate into the county level," he said.

Though they could not come to an agreement, Largent later commended Kinzer on being "graceful" during the debate. Kinzer, after the discussion, indicated he also held no hard feeling and said "it's not worth arguing over."

"I'm not going to push it," he said.

The commissioners decided to table a decision.

U.S. Congress designated "In God We Trust" as the national motto in 1956. The founder and president of In God We Trust-America, Jacquie Sullivan, said prominently displaying the

national motto is important because it promotes patriotism and preserves the motto's historical significance.

"It's part of our identity, it's part of our history," she said, adding it's "good for the community and good for the country as a whole."

So far, around 370 cities and counties across the country have voted to display the motto in their city halls and courthouses, Sullivan said. Whitman County would be the first in Washington to pass such a resolution, she said.

Sullivan is a long-time city councilwoman in Bakersfield, Calif. The organization's website said she began her efforts in 2001 after Sullivan heard about an East Coast group protesting the motto.

She later brought the issue to a vote in Bakersfield, and her fellow council members voted to display the motto in City Hall. Since then, she's been contacting cities and counties nationwide to take similar actions.

She said because Congress adopted the motto, cities and counties have the right to display it in their facilities. She said none of the government agencies contacted have been sued after deciding to display the motto.

In God We Trust-America's website can be found at ingodwetrust-america.org.

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