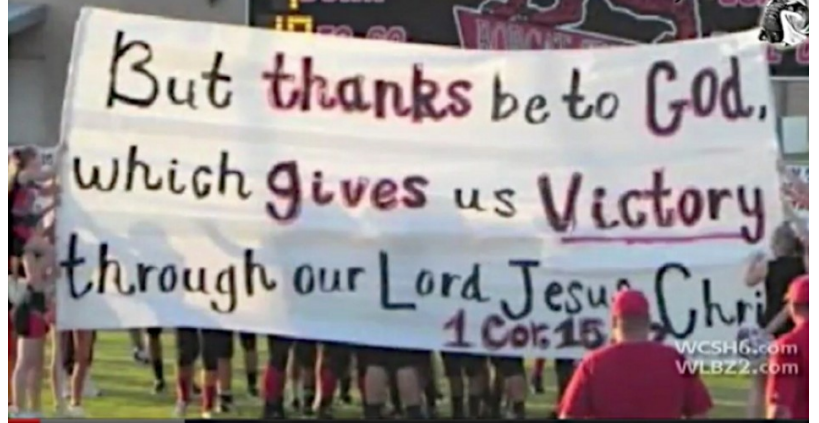




Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on October 1, 2012

Texas Cheerleaders Fight for Bible Banners on Football Field

Cheerleaders at the high school in Kountze, Texas, are taking on the the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) after the atheist group demanded the student group stop displaying the giant banners with Bible verses that the school's football team runs through at the beginning of games. Not surprisingly, the cheerleaders have had no shortage of individuals and groups come to their defense, including the Dallas-based conservative legal advocacy group [Liberty Institute](#), and, most recently, Texas' own attorney general, Greg Abott.



The FFRF had convinced Kevin Weldon, the superintendent of the Kountze Independent School District, to ban the cheerleaders from making and displaying the signs, which include such messages as the Bible verse: "But thanks be to God which gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." In its letter to the district, which has some 1,300 students, the FFRF complained that the Christian banners offended "non-Christians and non-believers alike," and cited court cases that supposedly set precedent for denying the Kountze cheerleaders the right to display their messages.

Weldon told local ABC affiliate KVUE that he was personally against banning the banners, but felt that his hands were legally tied. "It is not a personal opinion of mine," he said. "My personal convictions are that I am a Christian as well. But I'm also a state employee and Kountze ISD representative. And I was advised that [displaying religious signs] would be in direct violation of United State Supreme Court decisions."

But on September 20 the Liberty Institute persuaded a county judge to issue a [temporary restraining order](#) allowing the students to continue displaying their banners. And a few days Attorney General Abott followed up with his backing of the cheerleaders, informing Kountze school officials in a letter that they were wrong to prohibit the students' gesture, and pointing out that "the Supreme Court has never ruled that religion must be 'kept out' of public schools."

Abbot called the FFRF missive "menacing and misleading" and pointed out that the cases the atheist group had cited represented "decisions by public officials to promote a religious message or to direct the content of a private citizen's religious message," rather than the choice of students to use their own resources and initiative to provide signs expressing their own personal religious sentiments.

"Unlike the cases cited by the FFRF, Kountze ISD has neither made the decision to include a religious message on the cheerleaders' banner, nor provided any direction as to the content of the cheerleaders' message," Abbott wrote. "News reports indicate that these decisions were made entirely by the students. Those same news reports indicate that the banners were made by the cheerleaders off of school property and without the use of school funds."

Abbot promised the school officials: "If you decide to allow the cheerleaders to freely display their chosen message on their banners at football games, and if the Freedom from Religion Foundation or any other group sues Kountze ISD as a result, my office stands ready to file a brief with the court



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protecting the cheerleaders' religious liberties."

The FFRF responded to Abbot's letter, arguing that the attorney general had failed "to recognize the difference between free speech, such as what fans might say in the bleachers, and government speech, such as what cheerleaders in uniforms say as representatives of the school during school-sponsored events." Dan Barker, a spokesman for FFRF, told [Fox News](#) that "when those cheerleaders are wearing the uniform, when they're at an official public high school event, they are not speaking for themselves — they are representing the school, which has a diversity of viewpoints. School as a form of government must be neutral and include all viewpoints and not offend any viewpoints at that school."

But Mike Johnson, senior counsel with the Liberty Institute, noted that "the Supreme Court said more than 40 years ago and many courts have repeated it ever since, that students and teachers do not shed their constitutional rights to free speech when they walk through the schoolhouse gates."

Responding to the restraining order, Johnson said that his group was "excited that the cheerleaders for the Kountze High School Lions can again do what they do best — cheer on their football team without government censorship."

Photo: From YouTube video



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