



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on March 16, 2023

# High-school Football Coach Joe Kennedy Gets His Job Back

[Joe Kennedy is now back](#) as assistant varsity football coach for the Bremerton (Washington) High School Knights. After eight long years of litigation culminating in the Supreme Court ruling in *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District* last summer, the school will pay Kennedy \$5,304 to coach the team, and First Liberty Institute \$1,775,000 in legal fees for defending him.

When asked how he felt about being back on the field after being fired for praying on the field after games had ended, he said "Overall, it's been great. A lot of people have been praying for this for a long time, and I think America is ready to just enjoy the religious freedom once again."



jgareri/iStock/Getty Images Plus

Franklin Graham, son of evangelist Billy Graham, agreed:

I am glad to hear that Joe Kennedy has finally been reinstated as a football coach at the Washington state high school he was dismissed from for praying in the field after games in 2015....

This is great news! I hope that Coach Kennedy will continue to kneel in prayer — on and off the field — and that his win will protect and encourage others in the same situation.

Missing from nearly all of the muted media coverage was the enormous victory his win signals: the obliteration of the myth of the "wall of separation of church and state" that those opposed to Christianity have erected since the founding of the Republic. That "wall" has been used to justify all manner of secular interference and intimidation over the right, guaranteed in the First Amendment, for citizens to enjoy worshiping without governmental interference.

As Supreme Court Justice Neal Gorsuch wrote for the 6-3 majority:

Both the Free Exercise and Free Speech Clauses of the First Amendment protect expressions like Mr. Kennedy's.... The Constitution and the best of our traditions counsel mutual respect and tolerance, not censorship and suppression, for religious and nonreligious views alike....

Here, a government entity sought to punish an individual for engaging in a personal religious observance, based on a mistaken view that it has a duty to suppress religious observances even as it allows comparable secular speech.

The Constitution neither mandates nor tolerates that kind of discrimination. Mr. Kennedy is



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entitled to summary judgment on his religious exercise and free speech claims.

Tim Greenwood of Tim Greenwood Ministries provided one of the clearest definitions of the Founders' original intent on the matter more than 10 years ago:

The "wall" was understood as one-directional; its purpose was to protect the church from the state.

The world was not to corrupt the church; yet the church was free to teach the people Biblical values [without interference].

Instead, anti-Christian forces have for decades deliberately misread the Founders' intentions, based on a private letter from Jefferson written 10 years after the Constitution was ratified, in order to justify its war against Christianity. Gorsuch made that point clear in his majority opinion:

The Free Exercise and Free Speech Clauses of the First Amendment protect an individual engaging in a personal religious observance from government reprisal; the Constitution neither mandates nor permits the government to suppress such religious expression.

When attorneys for the school tried to make the case for that so-called "wall of separation" which it said it was defending by firing Kennedy, Gorsuch clarified the issue:

In truth, there is no conflict between the constitutional commands before us. There is only the "mere shadow" of a conflict, a false choice premised on a misconception of the Establishment Clause.

And in no world may a government entity's concerns about phantom constitutional violations justify actual violations of an individual's First Amendment rights...

Respect for religious expressions is indispensable to life in a free and diverse Republic — whether those expressions take place in a sanctuary or on a field, and whether they manifest through the spoken word or a bowed head. Here, a government entity sought to punish an individual for engaging in a brief, quiet, personal religious observance doubly protected by the Free Exercise and Free Speech Clauses of the First Amendment...

[T]he only meaningful justification the government offered for its reprisal rested on a mistaken view that it had a duty to ferret out and suppress religious observances even as it allows comparable secular speech.

The Constitution neither mandates nor tolerates that kind of discrimination.

Mr. Kennedy is entitled to summary judgment on his First Amendment claims. The judgment of the Court of Appeals is Reversed.

This is the unheralded victory most of the media covering the matter have ignored: There is no "wall of separation of church and state" that keeps religious sentiments from influencing our secular and steadily darkening world.

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