



## NEWS RELEASE

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### THE CONSTITUTION AND RELIGION IN THE CLASSROOM

#### First Amendment Teaching Materials Launched to Nation's Schools

**San Antonio, Texas (Religion News Writers Association Annual Conference, September 28, 2007)**

Over four thousand teachers have requested the Council for America's First Freedom's new DVD and 16 page teacher's manual, entitled, *The Constitution and Religion in the Classroom*. This program will assist teachers in presenting and implementing the religion clauses of the First Amendment in their classrooms in a balanced, fair and interesting lesson. The program will help teachers and students learn about the rights and responsibilities surrounding religious freedom in the classroom.

The material is primarily intended as a teaching resource for high school teachers, but teachers of elementary and college levels have been requesting copies, as well. Teachers and administrators will find it useful for their own edification as they encounter religious issues throughout the school.

The Council for America's First Freedom has offered these materials, at no charge as a free educational resource, to teachers around the nation through advertisements in educational magazines and by direct e-mail to high school teachers of social studies, English, debate and forensics as well as principals and guidance counselors throughout the country. In addition to the over 4,000 teachers already registered to receive these materials, the Council expects another 2,000-3,000 to register in the coming weeks.

The teacher's manual and DVD were thoroughly reviewed by teachers and Constitutional lawyers to ensure that they are fair, accurate, and balanced, and that they will be a useful teaching aid in the classroom.

President and CEO of the Council, Ambassador Robert A. Seiple stated, "the DVD focuses on a few points that emerged from a 90-minute debate between two First Amendment experts. Our

two debating attorneys are both superbly credentialed, specifically in this area of religion and the Constitution, and they provide interesting legal perspectives to practical problems that teachers face in the classroom.”

“To provide an in-depth feature presentation of the material, the Council has partnered with a Virginia and Colorado high school,” said Isabelle Kinnard, JD, Ph.D., the Council’s Vice President for Education. “Lakeland High School in Suffolk, Virginia and Southwest Open High School in Cortez, Colorado were chosen for two main reasons; they are unique in terms of the educational opportunities that they provide their students, and because their teachers have demonstrated exemplary interest in the Council’s mission to educate the young citizens of today to become the leaders of tomorrow. This feature presentation will be a collaborative project between featured teachers, India Meissel of Lakeland High School and Chad Wheelus and Sandi Valencia of Southwest Open High School and their respective schools.”

Ambassador Seiple added, “The mission of the Council for America’s First Freedom is to increase understanding and respect for religious freedom. Knowledge, which produces understanding, and respect are inextricably linked. It is hard to show respect for people, concepts or principles that we do not understand. It is our hope that the enclosed ‘tools’ will help to facilitate this understanding and generate greater respect within our schools and our pluralistic culture.”

“At the very least,” Dr. Kinnard added, “we trust that these materials will provide a useful baseline as teachers and students take ownership of this increasingly important issue. We, at the Council for America’s First Freedom, stand ready to help in any way possible as this subject is both presented in the classroom and applied throughout the school environment.”

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NOTE: Comments from teachers who have recently received the material are attached.

#### About the Council for America’s First Freedom

The guarantee of religious freedom first achieved legal and constitutional recognition through the work of Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and George Mason. Their joint efforts produced the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, a groundbreaking law passed in 1786 by the Virginia General Assembly. The Statute was the precursor to the religion clauses found in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

The mission of the Council for America’s First Freedom is to increase understanding and respect for religious freedom in diverse communities worldwide through education about this core human value: the freedom of thought, conscience and belief.

Our mission builds on this legacy that began in Richmond, Virginia, was included in our American Bill of Rights, and is now recognized as an international human right.

The Council is a politically and religiously neutral 501(c)(3) organization that provides educational outreach programs that encourage audiences worldwide to understand the beliefs of others, and to respect the right of religious freedom for all. For more information, visit: [www.firstfreedom.org](http://www.firstfreedom.org).