

**Press Release**

December 20, 2007

Southwestern Oklahoma State University Bans The Word "Christmas"

Weatherford, OK – Southwestern Oklahoma State University (SWOSU), has issued a disturbing policy which requires all employees to refrain from using the word "Christmas" in oral or written form. This directive was given by the university upon legal advice of the Oklahoma Attorney General, W.A. Drew Edmondson. Liberty Counsel sent a demand letter to SWOSU following a complaint from a university affiliate.

David Misak, the Director of Human Resources, recently visited various university departments and employee groups and informed everyone that any decorations featuring the words "Christ" or "Christmas" in any work or public areas of the university must be immediately removed. He also instructed everyone to discontinue the use of the term "Christmas" in their speech while on the job. This censorship specifically includes exchanging email greetings of "Merry Christmas" among employees or with nonemployees, whether initiated by a nonuniversity employee or not. Christmas remains a legal holiday for state employees, including those at SWOSU. The directive does not include any other legal holidays such as Thanksgiving or New Year's.

The announcements made by Misak are in direct violation of the United States Constitution and other federal law. The First Amendment prohibits government from being hostile to religion. Selecting one legal holiday for negative treatment and special restrictions solely because it has religious aspects clearly demonstrates hostility toward religion. Moreover, the free speech rights of employees at the university are infringed when their speech is censored solely because of a religious viewpoint or perceived religious viewpoint. A public employer like SWOSU also violates the Civil Rights Act when it prohibits its employees from using the words "Merry Christmas."

Liberty Counsel's demand letter requests an immediate reversal of the university's unconstitutional policy. Liberty Counsel's Friend or Foe Christmas Campaign educates and, if necessary, litigates to insure that Christmas is not censored.

Mathew D. Staver, Founder and Chairman of Liberty Counsel and Dean of Liberty University School of Law, commented: "Of all places, a public university should foster free expression. How can public university officials honestly believe that the state can prohibit its employees from wishing each other 'Merry Christmas?' After all, Christmas is a state and federal legal holiday."

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