

# Pledge of Allegiance

Official versions (changes in <i>bold italics</i> )
<b>1892</b>
"I pledge allegiance to my flag and the republic for which it stands: one nation indivisible with liberty and justice for all."
<b>1892 to 1923</b>
"I pledge allegiance to my flag and <i>to</i> the republic for which it stands: one nation indivisible with liberty and justice for all."
<b>1923 to 1924</b>
"I pledge allegiance to <i>the</i> flag <i>of the United States</i> and to the republic for which it stands: one nation indivisible with liberty and justice for all."
<b>1924 to 1954</b>
"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States <i>of America</i> , and to the republic for which it stands; one nation indivisible with liberty and justice for all."
<b>1954 to Present</b>
"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation <i>under God</i> , indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

The **Pledge of Allegiance** of the United States is an oath of loyalty to the national flag and the republic of the United States of America, originally composed by Francis Bellamy in 1892. The Pledge has been modified four times since then, with the most recent change adding the words "under God" in 1954. Congressional sessions open with the swearing of the Pledge, as do government meetings at local levels, meetings held by the Knights of Columbus, Royal Rangers, Boy Scouts of America, Girl Scouts of the USA, Fraternal Order of Eagles, Freemasons, Toastmasters International and their concordant bodies, as well as other organizations.

The Pledge of Allegiance reads:<sup>[1]</sup>

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

According to the United States Flag Code, the Pledge "should be rendered by standing at attention facing the flag with the right hand over the heart. Members of the Armed Forces and veterans who are present and not in uniform may render the military salute. Persons in uniform should remain silent, face the flag, and render the military salute".<sup>[1]</sup>

## History

The Pledge of Allegiance was written in 1892 by Francis Bellamy (1855–1931), who was a Baptist minister, a Christian socialist, and the cousin of socialist utopian novelist Edward Bellamy (1850–1898). Bellamy "viewed his Pledge as an 'inoculation' that would protect immigrants and native-born but insufficiently patriotic Americans from the 'virus' of radicalism and subversion."<sup>[2]</sup> The original "Pledge of Allegiance" was published in the September 8 issue of the popular children's magazine *The Youth's Companion* as part of the National Public-School Celebration of Columbus Day, a celebration of the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's arrival in the Americas. The event was conceived and promoted by James B. Upham, a marketer for the magazine, as a campaign to instill the idea of American nationalism by selling flags to public schools and magazines to students.<sup>[3] [4] [5] [6]</sup>

Bellamy's original Pledge read as follows:<sup>[7]</sup>

*I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands, one nation indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.*

The Pledge was supposed to be quick and to the point. Bellamy designed it to be recited in 15 seconds. As a socialist, he had initially also considered using the words *equality* and *fraternity*<sup>[6]</sup> but decided against it - knowing that the state superintendents of education on his committee were against equality for women and African Americans.<sup>[8]</sup>

Francis Bellamy and Upham had lined up the National Education Association to support the "Youth's Companion" as a sponsor of the Columbus Day observance along with the use of the American flag. By June 29, 1892, Bellamy and Upham had arranged for Congress and President Benjamin Harrison to announce a national proclamation making the public school flag ceremony the center of the national Columbus Day celebrations (this was issued as Presidential Proclamation 335). Subsequently, the Pledge was first used in public schools on October 12, 1892, during Columbus Day observances organized to coincide with the opening of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Illinois.<sup>[9]</sup>



Students swearing the Pledge on Flag Day in 1899

### Subsequent history

In 1923, the National Flag Conference called for the words "my Flag" to be changed to "the Flag of the United States", so that new immigrants would not confuse loyalties between their birth countries and the United States. The words "of America" were added a year later. The United States Congress officially recognized the Pledge as the official national pledge on June 22, 1942.

*I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.*

In 1940 the Supreme Court, in *Minersville School District v. Gobitis*, ruled that students in public schools, including the respondents in that case, Jehovah's Witnesses who considered the flag salute to be idolatry, could be compelled to swear the Pledge. A rash of mob violence and intimidation against Jehovah's Witnesses followed the ruling. In 1943 the Supreme Court reversed its decision, ruling in *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette* that public school students are not required to say the Pledge, concluding that "compulsory unification of opinion" violates the First Amendment.<sup>[10]</sup> In a later opinion, the Court held that students are also not required to stand for the Pledge.<sup>[11]</sup>



Students pledging to the flag with the Bellamy salute.

Swearing of the Pledge is accompanied by a salute. An early version of the salute, adopted in 1892, was known as the Bellamy salute. It started with the hand outstretched toward the flag, palm down, and ended with the palm up. Because of the similarity between the Bellamy salute and the Nazi salute, developed later, President Franklin D. Roosevelt instituted the hand-over-the-heart gesture as the salute to be rendered by civilians during the Pledge of Allegiance and the national anthem in the United States, instead of the Bellamy salute. Removal of the Bellamy salute occurred on December 22, 1942, when Congress amended the *Flag Code* language first passed into law on June 22, 1942.<sup>[12]</sup>

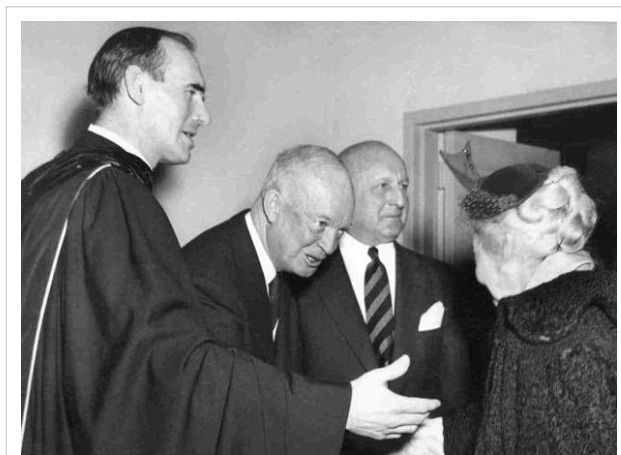
### Addition of the words "under God"

Louis A. Bowman (1872–1959) was the first to initiate the addition of "under God" to the Pledge. The National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution gave him an Award of Merit as the originator of this idea.<sup>[13]</sup>  
<sup>[14]</sup> He spent his adult life in the Chicago area and was Chaplain of the Illinois Society of the Sons of the American Revolution. At a meeting on February 12, 1948, Lincoln's Birthday, he led the Society in swearing the Pledge with two words added, "under God." He stated that the words came from Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Though not all manuscript versions of the Gettysburg Address contain the words "under God", all the reporters' transcripts of the speech as delivered do, as perhaps Lincoln may have deviated from his prepared text and inserted the phrase when he said "that the nation shall, under God, have a new birth of freedom." Bowman repeated his revised version of the Pledge at other meetings.<sup>[13]</sup>

In 1951, the Knights of Columbus, the world's largest Catholic fraternal service organization, also began including the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance.<sup>[15]</sup> In New York City, on April 30, 1951, the Board of Directors of the Knights of Columbus adopted a resolution to amend the text of their Pledge of Allegiance at the opening of each of the meetings of the 800 Fourth Degree Assemblies of the Knights of Columbus by addition of the words "under God" after the words "one nation." Over the next two years, the idea spread throughout Knights of Columbus organizations nationwide. On August 21, 1952, the Supreme Council of the Knights of Columbus at its annual meeting adopted a resolution urging that the change be made universal and copies of this resolution were sent to the President, the Vice President (as Presiding Officer of the Senate) and the Speaker of the House of Representatives. The National Fraternal Congress meeting in Boston on September 24, 1952, adopted a similar resolution upon the recommendation of its president, Supreme Knight Luke E. Hart. Several State Fraternal Congresses acted likewise almost immediately thereafter. This campaign led to several official attempts to prompt Congress to adopt the Knights of Columbus' policy for the entire nation. These attempts failed.

In 1952, Holger Christian Langmack wrote a letter to President Truman suggesting the inclusion of "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance. Mr. Langmack was a Danish philosopher and educator who came to America in 1911. He was one of the originators of the Prayer Breakfast and a religious leader in Washington, D.C. President Truman met with him along with several others to discuss the inclusion of "under God" and also "love" just before "liberty and justice". At the suggestion of a correspondent, Representative Louis C. Rabaut of Michigan sponsored a resolution to add the words "under God" to the Pledge in 1953.

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Rev. Dr. George MacPherson Docherty (left) and President Eisenhower (second from left) on the morning of February 7, 1954, at the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church

Prior to February 1954, no attempt to get the Pledge officially amended succeeded. The final successful push came from George MacPherson Docherty. Some American presidents honored Lincoln's birthday by attending services at the church Lincoln attended, New York Avenue Presbyterian Church by sitting in Lincoln's pew on the Sunday nearest February 12. On February 7, 1954, with President Eisenhower sitting in Lincoln's pew, the church's pastor, George MacPherson Docherty, delivered a sermon based on the Gettysburg Address titled "A New Birth of Freedom." He argued that the nation's might lay not in arms but its spirit and higher purpose. He noted that the Pledge's sentiments could be those of any nation, that "there was something missing in the pledge, and that which was missing was

the characteristic and definitive factor in the American way of life." He cited Lincoln's words "under God" as defining words that set the United States apart from other nations.

President Eisenhower, though raised a Jehovah's Witness, had been baptized a Presbyterian just a year before. He responded enthusiastically to Docherty in a conversation following the service. Eisenhower acted on his suggestion the next day and on February 8, 1954, Rep. Charles Oakman (R-Mich.), introduced a bill to that effect. Congress passed the necessary legislation and Eisenhower signed the bill into law on Flag Day, June 14, 1954.<sup>[16]</sup>

The phrase "under God" was incorporated into the Pledge of Allegiance June 14, 1954, by a Joint Resolution of Congress amending §7 of the Flag Code enacted in 1942.<sup>[16]</sup>

When Docherty's sermon was published in 1958,<sup>[17]</sup> President Eisenhower took the opportunity to write to Dr. Docherty with gratitude for the opportunity to once again read the sermon.

### Substitution of the words "under Law"

Some groups and individuals, finding "under God" objectionable, but not wanting to stand silently, substitute "under Law" (as a reference to the Constitution) for the less secular "under God".<sup>[18]</sup> This rendition is unofficial.

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under Law, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

### Criticism of requiring or promoting the Pledge

Requiring or promoting of the Pledge on the part of the government has drawn criticism and legal challenges on several grounds.

One objection<sup>[19]</sup> states that a democratic republic built on freedom of dissent should not require its citizens to pledge allegiance to it, and that the First Amendment to the United States Constitution protects one's right to refrain from speaking or standing (also a form of speech).<sup>[11]</sup> Another objection lies in the fact that the people who are most likely to recite the Pledge every day, small children in schools, cannot really give their consent or even completely understand the Pledge they are taking.

Many objections have been raised since the addition of the phrase "under God" to the Pledge in 1954.

Critics<sup>[20]</sup> contend that a government requiring or promoting this phrase violates protections against the establishment of religion guaranteed in the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

In 2004, linguist Geoffrey Nunberg criticized the addition of "under God" for a different reason. The original supporters of the addition thought that they were simply quoting Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. However, Nunberg said that to Lincoln and his contemporaries, "under God" meant "God willing" and they would have found its use in the Pledge of Allegiance grammatically incorrect.<sup>[21] [22]</sup>

### Legal challenges and responses

Prominent legal challenges in the 1940s were brought by the Jehovah's Witnesses, a group whose beliefs preclude swearing loyalty to any power other than God, ("Jehovah's Witnesses-Proclaimers of God's Kingdom" 1993 pgs 196-197) and who objected to policies in public schools requiring students to swear an oath to the flag. They objected on the grounds that their rights to freedom of religion as guaranteed by the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment were being violated by such requirements.



First graders of Japanese ancestry pledging allegiance to the American flag. (photo by Dorothea Lange).

In a 2002 case brought by atheist Michael Newdow, whose daughter was being taught the Pledge in school, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled the phrase "under God" an unconstitutional endorsement of monotheism when the Pledge was promoted in public school. In 2004, the Supreme Court heard *Elk Grove Unified School District v. Newdow*, an appeal of the ruling, and rejected Newdow's claim on the grounds that he was not the custodial parent, and therefore lacked standing, thus avoiding ruling on the merits of whether the phrase was constitutional in a school-sponsored recitation. On January 3, 2005, a new suit was filed in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California on behalf of three unnamed families. On September 14, 2005, District Court Judge Lawrence Karlton ruled in their favor. Citing the precedent of the 2002 ruling by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, Judge Karlton issued an Order stating that, upon proper motion, he would enjoin the school district defendants from continuing their practices of leading children in pledging allegiance to "one Nation under God".<sup>[23]</sup>

A bill, H.R. 2389, was introduced in Congress in 2005 which, if enacted into law, would have stripped the Supreme Court and most federal courts of the power to consider any legal challenges to government requiring or promoting of the Pledge of Allegiance. H.R. 2389 was passed by the House of Representatives in July 2006, but failed due to the Senate's not taking it up. This action is viewed in general as court stripping by Congress over the Judiciary. Even if a similar bill is enacted, its practical effect may not be clear: proponents of the bill have argued that it is a valid exercise of Congress's power to regulate the jurisdiction of the federal courts under Article III, Section 2 of the Constitution, but opponents question whether Congress has the authority to prevent the Supreme Court from hearing claims based on the Bill of Rights (since amendments postdate the original text of the Constitution and may thus implicitly limit the scope of Article III, Section 2). Judges and legal analysts have voiced concerns that Congress can strip or remove from the judicial branch the ability to determine if legislation is constitutional.<sup>[24]</sup>

Mark J. Pelavin, Associate Director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, objected to court stripping in regards to the Pledge of Allegiance, "Today's House adoption of the so-called "Pledge Protection Act" is a shameful effort to strip our federal courts of their ability to uphold the rights of all Americans. By removing the jurisdiction of federal courts, including the Supreme Court, from cases involving the Pledge, this legislation sets a dangerous precedent: threatening religious liberty, compromising the vital system of checks and balances upon which our government was founded, and granting Congress the authority to strip the courts' jurisdiction on any issue it wishes. Today, the issue was the Pledge of Allegiance, but tomorrow it could be reproductive rights, civil rights, or any other fundamental concern."<sup>[25]</sup>

In 2006, in the Florida case *Frazier v. Alexandre*, No. 05-81142 (S.D. Fla. May 31, 2006), a federal district court in Florida ruled that a 1942 state law requiring students to stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance violates the First and Fourteenth Amendments of the U.S. Constitution.<sup>[26]</sup> As a result of that decision, a Florida school district was ordered to pay \$32,500 to a student who chose not to say the pledge and was ridiculed and called "unpatriotic" by a teacher.<sup>[27]</sup>

In 2009, a Montgomery County, Maryland, teacher berated and had school police remove a 13-year-old girl who refused to say the Pledge of Allegiance in the classroom. The student's mother, assisted by the American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland, sought and received an apology from the teacher, as state law and the school's student handbook both prohibit students from being forced to recite the Pledge.<sup>[28]</sup>

On March 11, 2010, the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit upheld the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance in the case of *Newdow vs Rio Linda Union School District*.<sup>[29]</sup> <sup>[30]</sup> In a 2-1 decision, the appellate court ruled that the words were of a "ceremonial and patriotic nature" and did not constitute an establishment of religion.<sup>[29]</sup> Judge Stephen Reinhardt dissented, writing that "the state-directed, teacher-led daily recitation in public schools of the amended 'under God' version of the Pledge of Allegiance... violates the Establishment Clause of the Constitution."<sup>[31]</sup>

On November 12, 2010, in a unanimous decision,<sup>[32]</sup> the United States Court of Appeals for the First Circuit in Boston affirmed a ruling by a New Hampshire lower federal court which found that the pledge's reference to God doesn't violate students' rights.<sup>[33]</sup>

About half the states encourage schools to recite the pledge.<sup>[34]</sup>

## Notes

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- [2] Beato, Greg (2010-12-16) Face the Flag (<http://reason.com/archives/2010/12/16/face-the-flag>), *Reason*
- [3] "Amazing History of the Pledge of Allegiance" (<http://historyofthepledge.com/history.html>). .
- [4] "A The Pledge of Allegiance was just an ad to sell magazines" (<http://www.tcdailyplanet.net/blog/grace-kelly/pledge-allegiance-was-just-ad-sell-magazines?print=1>). .
- [5] "A Federated Republic or One Nation?" (<http://www.fff.org/freedom/fd0505d.asp>). .
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- [7] Francis Bellamy - The word "to" was inserted between "...my Flag and" and "the Republic" in October 1892.
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- [17] NY: Harper & Bros.
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- Minister Reprises "Under God" Sermon (<http://www.post-gazette.com/nation/20020819pledge0819p1.asp>)

## External links

- Annual Pledge Across America - held on Constitution Day, September 17 (<http://www.pledgeacrossamerica.org/>)
  - The Pledge of Allegiance: A Brief Commentary ([http://www.opednews.com/articles/opedne\\_michael\\_\\_060709\\_the\\_pledge\\_of\\_allegi.htm](http://www.opednews.com/articles/opedne_michael__060709_the_pledge_of_allegi.htm))
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