

Beacon Hill Byline – By Rep. Mary Rogeness

July 6, 2002

## God and Country

What were those judges thinking? You know which ones I mean. The ones in California, the federal judges on the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals – the judges who ruled two weeks ago that it was unconstitutional to include “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance. Were they recalling that school prayer has been ruled unconstitutional? Were they remembering that it is unconstitutional to display the Ten Commandments in public buildings? Did they think nobody would notice?

If ever there is a time for such a ruling, it is not this season or this year. It’s the Fourth of July. It is a time of war. Enemy terrorists are pledging to wage holy war against us. It is not a time for judges to say we cannot say in our pledge to the flag that the nation is under God.

They remind me of the judge in Miracle on 34th Street. He had been asked to rule that there is no Santa Claus. But he did better than the federal judges. He understood that the public would not tolerate such a ruling and found a way around it.

In the days since the court ruled, I have thought of several mentions of God in American public life. Our money makes the statement, “In God we trust.” America the Beautiful includes the line “God shed his grace on thee.” “God Bless America”, always a popular favorite, has this year replaced “Take me out to the ballgame” as the music of the 7th inning stretch. Is it only a matter of time before such phrases are banned? Will we teach patriotic music to children in secret?

I don’t think so.

What has happened in the days since the federal judges ruled? The United States Senate and the Massachusetts Senate, both of which had previously removed the Pledge of Allegiance from their normal schedules, opened sessions with the full 1954 version of the pledge. The Massachusetts House of Representatives opens each session with the Pledge, but last week we repeated the words twice and sent a resolution affirming our support of existing language to the Ninth Circuit. President Bush celebrated Independence Day with his own repetition of the Pledge. Our nation, Under God, has never before been honored by so many voices in so little time.

School administrators in the western states under the jurisdiction of the Ninth Circuit have stated that they will risk arrest before they change the wording for their students. The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, newly exposed to millions of Americans as a court known in legal circles for the high percentage of its rulings overturned by the Supreme Court, stayed the ruling. It will re-hear the case with a full complement of judges. And, if that court affirms the first decision, it will be appealed to the Supreme Court.

Red Skelton recorded a word-by-word explanation of the Pledge of Allegiance that has become a standard patriotic recitation. He described the words from his own boyhood, long before the addition of “Under God,” and then he referred to the addition with these prescient words: “Since I was a small boy ... two words have been added to the Pledge of Allegiance: Under God. Wouldn’t it be a pity if someone said that is a prayer, and that would be eliminated from schools too?”

It is one sentence of 31 words. But those words are a complete statement of love of country for each American:

*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.*