

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 1004

A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION, Supporting and encouraging the academic study of the Bible in South Dakota public schools.

WHEREAS, for nearly two thousand years, the Bible has been a cornerstone of Western civilization, its content permeating nearly all aspects of culture, manifesting itself most notably in literature, music, art, drama, public discourse, and philosophy; and

WHEREAS, biblical references abound in the works of literature, including those of William Shakespeare and John Milton, and allusions to biblical themes and characters have been used effectively by writers as diverse as Dante Alighieri and William Faulkner; and

WHEREAS, the Bible has been a source for public discourse and policy both past and present; and great leaders, including George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King, Jr., inspired entire generations by including in their speeches biblical references and language; and

WHEREAS, the English language itself is so filled with biblical vocabulary, themes, terms and allusions, that it cannot be fully understood and appreciated by individuals unfamiliar with the Bible, depriving them of much of the richness of the language; and

WHEREAS, a report on Bible literacy, which included findings from a Gallup Poll survey on American teenagers' knowledge of the Bible, found that American high school students are deficient in their academic knowledge of the Bible and that this deficiency is a limiting factor in their ability to study literature and to understand art, music, history, and culture; and

WHEREAS, United States Supreme Court Justice Tom Clark, in the 1963 case *Abington v. Schempp*, wrote, " ... it might well be said that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization [and] ... that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities. Nothing we have said here indicates that such study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistently with the First Amendment;" and

WHEREAS, in a document titled *The Bible & Public Schools, a First Amendment Guide*, twenty diverse groups including the National School Boards Association agreed that the Bible can and should be taught in public schools as long as such teaching is academic and not devotional in nature,

demonstrates an awareness of the religious nature of the Bible but does not press students to accept religion, does not engage in the practice of religion, neither encourages or discourages differing religious views, and does not ask students to conform to any religious belief; and

WHEREAS, George Gallup polling and other research over the years has shown that more than two-thirds of the American public believe the Bible should be taught in public schools as part of the literature or social studies curriculum; and

WHEREAS, this legislative body acknowledges the academic advantage to students of a basic familiarity with the Bible:

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the House of Representatives of the Eighty-seventh Legislature of the State of South Dakota, the Senate concurring therein, that the Legislature of the State of South Dakota hereby declares its support and encouragement for all school districts in the state to implement a course of study or to include in the literature or social studies curriculum courses or lessons that help students become familiar with the content, characters, and narratives of the Bible and to include in such courses an awareness of the role the Bible has played in the development of literature, art, music, culture, and public discourse; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the State Board of Education be asked to incorporate such support into its curriculum planning and that the board make all educational bodies in the state aware of textbooks and other curriculum materials that have been prepared to teach about the Bible within the guidelines and context of the First Amendment; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that no state, district, or local educational body should prevent the teaching of courses or classes on the Bible so long as those courses meet the guidelines of the First Amendment; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this legislative body also supports and encourages any effort to make teacher training available to those teachers who wish to pursue both providing elective courses or integrating the Bible into existing literature or social studies courses so that they be made aware of the issues involved in teaching the Bible in a public school setting; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the clear intent of this resolution be to encourage districts, teachers, school staff, the media, and other interested parties to build an understanding and consensus as to the importance of teaching about the Bible and its influence on culture in the public schools of this state; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that there be clear and consistent communication of the importance of basic literacy of the Bible and its impact as well as communication of this resolution to all school districts within this state.

Adopted by the House of Representatives,
Concurred in by the Senate,

January 25, 2012
January 30, 2012

Val Rausch
Speaker of the House

Karen Gerdes
Chief Clerk of the House

Matt Michels
President of the Senate

Fee Jacobsen
Secretary of the Senate