

**AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF
GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**

Press Release #1072

***Trump receives report from Religious Liberty Commission
in the Oval Office***

[Politics](#) Jun 26, 2026 5:04 PM EDT

A new report by a Trump administration commission suggests replacing the idea of separating church and state with the idea of building bridges between them. The assertion — challenging a longstanding concept in American law — comes amid a raft of recommendations in a draft report of the Religious Liberty Commission, released Friday afternoon.

The advisory body was created by President Donald Trump last year and filled almost entirely by conservative Christians. The 224-page draft report — part policy document, part philosophical argument — echoes members' support for a stronger role for religion and religious expression in government, schools and the public square.

[WATCH: Trump speaks at Faith and Freedom Coalition policy conference](#)

The report applauds recent Supreme Court decisions expanding rights to religious expression in public settings, such as creating opt-outs for religious objections to school lessons.

The report recommends eliminating the "Johnson Amendment" that forbids political activities by tax-exempt religious groups — a longstanding goal of Trump. It calls for compensating military service members who were discharged for refusing COVID-19 vaccines.

It calls in general for allowing more religious expression in the public square, greater access to public money for faith-based agencies and broader exemptions for those claiming conscientious objections to policies ranging from vaccine mandates to pronoun usage to classroom lessons.

It recommends that federal agencies publish "Know Your Rights" posters for various settings and establish hotlines to receive complaints about religious liberty violations.

The draft report also calls for the creation of new honors — a Presidential Medal of Religious Liberty and First Freedom Hero Awards. And it calls for exhibits and markers at historic sites paying tribute to the role of religion in American history.

The draft report is now available for public comment over the next 15 days. It is sure to draw opposition.

Some other groups defend the separation of church and state

A coalition of groups – including one suing over the commission's lack of ideological diversity, as required of federal advisory panels – issued a preemptive report earlier in June defending the concept of church-state separation.

"Religious liberty belongs to all people, not to any single tradition, political party, or administration," said the report, published by the Center for American Progress and others.

[**WATCH: America's 250th anniversary revives questions about religion and the founders**](#)

Critics of the Religious Liberty Commission' work say its perspective is skewed toward views by favored by Trump and his supporters and that it heard almost entirely from like-minded scholars and activists. They say the commission failed adequately to address such issues as anti-Muslim efforts in Texas and elsewhere, and also the rise of antisemitism on the right, not just the left.

The report comes as conservative states such as Texas have worked to incorporate more religion into public spaces such as classrooms, including Bible lessons and Ten Commandments displays.

Trump, speaking to supporters at a Faith & Freedom Coalition gathering in Washington on Friday, touted the newly released report.

"We saved religion, it was going down," he boasted.

Trump contended that the administration of his predecessor, Democrat Joe Biden, had carried out a "reign of persecution."

While the commission report downplays the separation of church and state, the commission didn't go so far as to call it a "lie," as the commission chairman, Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, did in April.

But it largely took the stance that the idea is misapplied.

"To be clear, this does not involve or require advocating 'theocracy' or even the total elimination of any separation between church and state," the report says. Rather, it calls for honoring a "tension between the relevant clauses of the First Amendment" that guarantee religious freedom but forbid any government-established church.

Supreme Court rulings on church/state issues have evolved

The phrase, "a wall of separation between church and state" does not appear in the Constitution, but it's embodied in Supreme Court precedent. Thomas Jefferson used that expression in a letter to Baptists, supporting them in opposing official churches in U.S. states, a practice that soon ended.

Twentieth-century decisions by the high court invoked the "separation" phrase to extend the First Amendment's prohibition on federal church establishment to state and local governments, citing the 14th Amendment's ban on states denying citizens' rights.

That led to bans on official prayers and Ten Commandments displays in public schools. The Supreme Court in recent years has steered a different course, permitting such things as a public school coach's on-field prayers and a religious opt-out for parents objecting to a lesson on transgender issues.

The draft report contends that even Jefferson didn't believe in completely banishing religion from public life, but rather in keeping church and state in a kind of balance.

"In reality, the church and state strengthen and support one another," it says.

The report touts the value of religion to society in terms of providing humanitarian work, anchoring families and acting as "conscience" monitoring government.

"In many cases the law protects the religious expression of Americans, but government officials and employers often use fear tactics to silence individuals into believing that they don't have the right to publicly express their faith," it argues.

It argues — citing one of its own members, Catholic media figure Bishop Robert Barron — that notions of strict church-state separation can be traced to a "God is dead" ideology that originated in Europe and saw traditional religion as an opponent to individual autonomy.

"This way of thinking made its way ... into the American culture and courtroom," the report said.

Little recognition for non-religious Americans

The report, while touting the value of religion, appears to give little emphasis on the large population of Americans with no religious affiliation. A key argument of many atheists and secular humanists is that one can be "good without God" — that religion doesn't have a monopoly on virtue and can do harm as well as good.

The lawsuit challenging the commission, filed by the Interfaith Alliance and other religious groups, says its lack of ideological range is shown in that commissioners have asserted that America is specifically a Judeo-Christian or Christian nation and that most commission meetings took place at the Museum of the Bible in Washington, an institution with Christian leadership.

The Republican administration is asking a federal court to dismiss the lawsuit. The government is citing legal technicalities and contending the law does not define how a commission should be fairly balanced or whose viewpoints should be represented. This draft report comes two months after another entity created by Trump — the **Task Force to Eradicate Anti-Christian Bias** — issued its own report. It claimed that Christians faced discrimination under the administration of Democratic President Joe Biden in areas such as education, tax law and prosecution of anti-abortion protesters. Progressive critics said that the report failed to prove its case and amounted to advocacy rather than an investigation.

***Listen to the DOGS program on 3CR
855 ON THE AM DIAL:
12.00 NOON SATURDAYS
<http://www.3cr.org.au/dogs>***