

GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
OFFICE

AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION

Governmental Affairs Office

740 Fifteenth Street, NW
Washington, DC 20005-1022
(202) 662-1760
FAX: (202) 662-1762

DIRECTOR

Robert D. Evans
(202) 662-1765
rdevans@staff.abanet.org

DEPUTY DIRECTOR

Denise A. Cardman
(202) 662-1761
cardmand@staff.abanet.org

SENIOR LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL

R. Larson Frisby
(202) 662-1098
frisbyr@staff.abanet.org

Lillian B. Gaskin

(202) 662-1768
gaskinl@staff.abanet.org

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL

Kristi Gaines
(202) 662-1763
gainesk@staff.abanet.org

Kenneth J. Goldsmith

(202) 662-1789
goldsmithk@staff.abanet.org

Kerry M. Lawrence

(202) 662-1766
lawrenck@staff.abanet.org

Ellen McBarnette

(202) 662-1767
mcbarnee@staff.abanet.org

E. Bruce Nicholson

(202) 662-1769
nicholsonb@staff.abanet.org

DIRECTOR GRASSROOTS
OPERATIONS/LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL

Julie M. Strandlie
(202) 662-1764
strandlj@staff.abanet.org

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

LAW CONSULTANT
Hayden Gregory
(202) 662-1772
gregoryh@staff.abanet.org

STATE LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL

Rita C. Aguilar
(202) 662-1780
aguilarr@staff.abanet.org

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT

Julie Pasatiempo
(202) 662-1776
jpasatiempo@staff.abanet.org

STAFF DIRECTOR FOR
INFORMATION SERVICES

Sharon Greene
(202) 662-1014
greenes@staff.abanet.org

EDITOR WASHINGTON LETTER

Rhonda J. McMillion
(202) 662-1017

June 6, 2006

**Honorable F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr.
Chair, Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515**

VIA E-MAIL

RE: H.R. 2389, THE PLEDGE PROTECTION ACT OF 2005

Dear Mr. Chairman:

We understand that an announcement was made today that your Committee will mark up H.R. 2389 tomorrow. We oppose this legislation, which would strip from all federal courts jurisdiction to hear constitutional challenges to the interpretation of, or the validity of, the Pledge of Allegiance. We are concerned that the lack of a hearing, coupled with the unusually short notice of the scheduled markup, effectively deprives your Committee members of the opportunity to engage in thoughtful deliberation after hearing from individuals and organizations with diverse viewpoints.

Our views on H.R. 2389 are informed by our long-standing opposition to legislative curtailment of the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court of the United States and the inferior federal courts for the purpose of effecting changes in constitutional law. The ABA has taken no position on the underlying issues regarding recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in public schools; instead, our strong opposition to H.R. 2389 and other pending legislation that would strip the federal courts of jurisdiction to hear selected types of constitutional cases is based on our concern for the integrity of our system of government.

This legislation would authorize Congress to use its regulatory power over federal jurisdiction to advance a particular legislative outcome by insulating it from constitutional scrutiny by the federal judiciary. In addition to being constitutionally suspect, this legislation would establish a dangerous precedent if enacted. As a matter of policy, Congress should not jettison our foundational principles because of current dissatisfaction with a controversial decision of the Supreme Court or lower federal courts by permanently stripping the jurisdiction of the federal courts to hear certain categories of cases. Rather than strengthening its legislative role, Congress, by pressing its own checking power to the extreme, imperils the entire system of separated powers.

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This legislation would restrict the role of the federal courts in our system of checks and balances and thereby limit the ability of the federal courts to protect the Constitutional rights of all Americans. Indeed, this legislation would leave the state courts as the final arbiters of federal constitutional law, creating the possibility that some state judges might choose not to follow Supreme Court precedents. Because the legislation would nullify the Supremacy Clause in certain classes of cases, the Constitution could mean something different from state to state; and, contrary to what we have always believed, our fundamental rights and the balance of power among the branches would be subject to evanescent majority opinion.

At a time when Congress is accusing the federal courts of overstepping their constitutional role and calling for judicial restraint, we urge you to likewise exercise legislative restraint and demonstrate your continued commitment to the doctrine of separation of powers and a government composed of separate but coequal branches by voting to oppose H.R. 2389.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert D. Evans".

Robert D. Evans

cc. Members of the Committee on the Judiciary