



June 26, 2006

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the more than 900,000 members and supporters of People For the American Way, we write to urge you to vote against S.J. Res. 12, the proposed constitutional amendment to ban flag desecration.

Freedom of expression is at the very heart of our democracy. At a time when we are working across the globe to secure the right of everyone to be free from totalitarian regimes, it is all the more important that we distinguish ourselves from countries that fear political dissent and imprison dissenters for expressing their views. We have never needed to coerce patriotism or respect for our national symbols in America. In fact, in the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks, we have seen an outpouring of patriotic sentiment as well as support for the flag and public displays of the flag.

While most Americans find desecration of the flag offensive or distasteful, the strength of our nation lies in our ability to tolerate dissent and free speech even when—especially when—we disagree. We should not let a handful of offensive individuals cause us to surrender the very freedoms that make us a beacon of liberty for the rest of the world.

Others have said it far better than we can. In a 1999 letter, Colin Powell wrote “The First Amendment exists to insure that freedom of speech and expression applies not just to that with which we agree or disagree, but also that which we find outrageous. I would not amend that great shield of democracy to hammer a few miscreants. The flag will be flying proudly long after they have slunk away.”

It is especially troubling that the Committee would seek to amend the U.S. Constitution and the First Amendment without even holding a hearing on the need for such an amendment. This exposes the obvious: the case for the flag desecration amendment on the merits, never strong to begin with, has only grown weaker over time. The flag desecration amendment is an exercise in politics, not patriotism.

We urge you to protect our First Amendment freedoms by voting against S.J. Res. 12, the flag desecration amendment.

Sincerely,

Ralph G. Neas
President

Tanya Clay House
Director, Public Policy