

Hice: Commandments lawsuit was moral terrorism

Forum

I'm not one to defend myself from verbal antagonism. But the Athens Banner-Herald's editorial ("Commandments group should pay ACLU court costs," July 21) about Ten Commandments-Georgia, Inc. was not only unprofessional, it lacked class and chronological accuracy. Much of the information was twisted at best, not to mention cynical. In the first place, TC-Ga. did not start this battle, as the editorial implied. An anonymous individual, whom we still know nothing about, started the lawsuit challenging the display of the Ten Commandments in the Barrow County Courthouse. TC-Ga. did not even exist until after the lawsuit was under way.

Once Barrow commissioners determined to fight the lawsuit, TC-Ga. was formed to help raise money so tax funds wouldn't have to be spent. It's disappointing we weren't able to raise all the money needed to complete the fight against the American Civil Liberties Union, which argued on behalf of the anonymous person. I sincerely believe we could have slammed the door on them, preventing this type of frivolous and expensive lawsuit from happening to other counties. But our pockets were simply not deep enough.

TC-Ga. has, however, given Barrow County more than \$212,000 for legal expenses. That is nothing to sneeze at. Even so, the question is, "Why are we behind on payments?" Well, for nearly six months, everything was on hold while we awaited U.S. Supreme Court rulings on Ten Commandments cases from Texas and Kentucky. During that time, virtually no one contributed to TC-Ga. - everyone was waiting. Within days of the rulings, federal District Court Judge William O'Kelley announced a hearing for Barrow County, and an agreement was reached almost immediately. His order and the settlement came so fast, we had no time to rally supporters.

Yes, we still owe about \$52,000. (We have paid about \$70,000 of the \$81,547.49 the county "loaned" us, and they incurred approximately \$40,000 in additional expenses since then.) And, because people do not generally support a fight that is over, fund raising will probably be more difficult now. Nonetheless, following the court order, I contacted Barrow County Commission Chairman Doug Garrison and assured him of our intention to pay back all of the \$52,000. Barrow County residents, and others who are concerned, need to know we are still committed to that, and will do all we can to accomplish it.

But paying a judgment to the ACLU, as the editorial suggested we should, is an entirely different matter, and the commissioners are aware of that fact. People who generously supported this battle have done so in an effort to defeat the ACLU, not pay them. I cannot expect those same people to give their money to the ones they tried to defeat.

In fact, very early in this lawsuit, I informed the commissioners our ability to fund the battle was limited to legal expenses, not including judgments if the case was lost.

It was also acknowledged on several occasions that if the commissioners didn't fight, we could not raise money. Our ability to raise funds was directly related to their resolve. They have known all along that ultimately, they were responsible for the bills.

To accuse TC-Ga. of forsaking the commissioners and having a "cut-and-run" attitude following the settlement, as the editorial did, is ludicrous. TC-Ga. has been a dedicated supporter and advocate during the entire ordeal. We continue to be.

Also in the editorial, there were some examples of the ACLU representing religious cases. The editorial implied I do not understand their compassionate activities. The fact is, the vast majority of ACLU cases are anti-religious, anti-moral and utterly anti-American, at least from the perspective of America's mainstream. It is no secret the founder of the ACLU was a communist, who specifically instructed his followers to "wave flags" and appear patriotic while undermining the values of America's heritage. It is an erroneous endeavor to try and make the ACLU look pristine when it comes to defending religious liberties.

It is easy to be a "Monday-morning quarterback" and rationalize unfounded accusations. Anyone can advise TC-Ga. of the "reasonable" and "honorable" thing to do. The fact is, we tried.

We should bear in mind the real issue regarding tax money. What are tax dollars for if not to defend our rights? Just look at what our tax dollars are doing to protect us from terrorism. In my opinion, what happened to Barrow County was an act of "moral terrorism," and someone must defend us, even if it includes tax dollars. And if you are going to be upset about spending tax money, instead of blaming TC-Ga. or the commissioners, why not look at the "John Doe" who filed the lawsuit? This battle has cost him nothing, and he didn't even have the courage to reveal his identity. He is the one, along with his liberal attorneys, now compelling the taxpayers of Barrow County to support his favorite "charity," the ACLU. The commissioners have simply done their duty to fight for our freedoms.

"John Doe" says he did not feel "welcome" in seeing the Ten Commandments in the courthouse. I wonder how he would feel if he saw thousands of Ten Commandments yard signs throughout the state?

We still have that liberty, at least for the time being. If thousands of citizens would post yards signs, TC-Ga. could accomplish two things - pay the outstanding legal bill, and publicly affirm our core beliefs.

When the next generation asks, "Where were you when they took down the Ten Commandments?" may we be able to proclaim, "I was not criticizing the players from the sidelines, I was in the game."

• Dr. Jody Hice is president of Ten Commandments - GA, Inc. The organization can be contacted at P.O. Box 177, Bethlehem, GA 30620, at 1-888-STAND-4-GA, or on the Web at www.ThouShalt.org. Click here to return to story: http://onlineathens.com/stories/073105/opi_20050731064.shtml