

10 Commandments may return to Barrow County ... but not alone

Published: December 8, 2005

The Ten Commandments may return to the Barrow County courthouse from which they were removed this past summer, but they would appear in a slightly diminished role.

A bill being proposed by state Reps. Tommy Benton (R-Jefferson) and Terry England (R-Auburn) would allow counties to display historical documents on public property. That would allow the Commandments to make an encore appearance, though alongside other documents of historical significance.

House Bill 941, which would also be co-sponsored by state Rep. Timothy Bearden (R-Villa Rica), was pre-filed in November before the General Assembly session that will reopen in January. The Mayflower Compact of 1620, the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and the Commandments are documents specifically included in the bill, according to the Associated Press. "They just can't pick up the Ten Commandments and hang it. It is to be hung in context with the other documents to show the historical significance," England said in the AP story. "The Ten Commandments were the basis for our country's Constitution."

It is not believed that such a law would violate the federal court order which dictated the Commandment's original removal, said Barrow County attorney Angela Davis.

Acceptable compromise?

Some pro-Commandments groups have resisted such displays, saying they would lessen the Commandment's impact and place them in the realm of ancient documents with little contemporary relevance. But others believe such a compromise may be acceptable if other avenues have been exhausted.

Mike Griffin, director of Ten Commandments Georgia, a non-profit group seeking to promote the Commandments in the everyday life of people, says credit for the development should go to an unlikely group.

Commanding attention

"The people we should thank the most in all of this are the ACLU and offended citizens of the country who have brought this to the forefront," he said. "They have given attention to the Ten Commandments that has been needed in this country.

"Politicians see that support for the Commandments has a broad base. It's not a Baptist thing; it's not even a Christian thing. People have an appreciation for moral decency and therefore appreciate the Ten Commandments."