



# In God We Trust Motto Overview

## Legal/Regulatory Precedence and Rule of Law

- Aronow v. United States 432 F.2d 242 (1970) in the United States Court of Appeals, Ninth Circuit.
  - The court ruled that, "It is quite obvious that the national motto and the slogan on coinage and currency 'In God We Trust' has nothing whatsoever to do with the establishment of religion. Its use is of patriotic or ceremonial character and bears no true resemblance to a governmental sponsorship of a religious exercise."
  - The decision was cited in Elk Grove Unified School District v. Newdow, a 2004 case on the Pledge of Allegiance: "These acts of 'ceremonial deism' are 'protected from Establishment Clause scrutiny chiefly because they have lost, through rote repetition, any significant religious content.'"
- Zorach v. Clauson (1952)
  - The Supreme Court held the nation's, "institutions presuppose a Supreme Being" and that government recognition of God does not constitute the establishment of a state church as the Constitution's authors intended to prohibit."
- Madalyn Murray O'Hair, et al. v. W. Michael Blumenthal, Secretary of Treasury, et al. 588 F.2d 1144 (1979) in the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit.
  - Ms. O'Hair is known for successfully challenging compulsory prayer in U.S. public schools. The United States District Court, Western District of Texas, referring to the wording of the Ninth Circuit above, ruled that, "From this it is easy to deduce that the Court concluded that the primary purpose of the slogan was secular; it served as secular ceremonial purpose in the obviously secular function of providing a medium of exchange. As such it is equally clear that the use of the motto on the currency or otherwise does not have a primary effect of advancing religion." This ruling was also sustained by the Fifth Circuit Court.
- The atheist Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc. conducted a national survey showing that "*In God We Trust*" was regarded as religious by an overwhelming percentage of American citizens. The results prompted the filing of a lawsuit on June 8, 1994 in a Denver, CO District Court to have the phrase removed from U.S. paper currency and coins, as well as to discontinue its use as the national motto.
  - Their lawsuit was dismissed by the District Court without trial on the grounds that the motto is not a religious phrase. A federal judge with the Tenth-Circuit Court of Appeals confirmed the dismissal, stating in part, "...we find that a reasonable observer, aware of the purpose, context, and history of the phrase 'In God We Trust,' would not consider its use or its reproduction on U.S. currency to be an endorsement of religion."
  - The U.S. Supreme Court—where the national motto hangs on the wall—declined to review all of these rulings saying that, "[o]ur previous opinions have considered in dicta the motto and the pledge [of allegiance], characterizing them as consistent with the proposition that government may not communicate an endorsement of religious belief."