

Rothman Introduces Bill Calling On National Mock Trial Competition to Let Children of All Faiths Com

Congressman

NEWS RELEASE

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Rothman Introduces Bill Calling On National Mock Trial Competition to Let Children of All Faiths Compete

--National Mock Trial Organizers Still Refusing to Let Children of All Faiths Compete in National Competition without Violating Deeply Held Religious Beliefs --

(Washington, DC) - Continuing in his fight to guarantee equal access and opportunities for people of all faiths, Congressman Steve Rothman (D-Fair Lawn) today introduced a resolution which calls on the Board of Directors of the National High School Mock Trial Championship to accommodate the religious beliefs of all students participating in the competition and urges the Board to restructure the rules of the competition to allow qualifying students of all faiths to compete fully in this national championship without betraying their religious beliefs. Rothman co-authored the resolution with Congressman Jim Ramstad (R-MN).

"The National High School Mock Trial Championship has been, until recently, a prestigious event that requires a tremendous amount of preparation, skill, and dedication on behalf of those students who are competing, and is looked upon with distinction by institutions of higher learning," said Rothman. "However, the competition's schedule, which consists of two rounds on Friday and two rounds on Saturday, followed by a Championship round on Saturday, negatively affects an increasing number of students from various religious backgrounds in the United States, including Christians, Jews, and Muslims who observe the Saturday Sabbath. Therefore, although this competition is open to participating students from all 50 states, plus the Virgin Islands and the Northern Marianna Islands, not all students are able to participate because of the Board of Directors of the National High School Mock Trial Championship's refusal to make any modifications to the competition's schedule that would accommodate the observance of the Saturday Sabbath."

Rothman became involved in this national dispute last spring at the request of the team that represented New Jersey at the 2005 championship, the Torah Academy of Teaneck. The Torah Academy is a yeshiva, an orthodox Jewish high school, the students of which cannot participate in any competition on the Saturday Sabbath. In April 2005, after Rothman pressured the Board and contacted the sponsor of the 2005 Championship, satisfactory accommodations were made to allow the Torah Academy to compete without violating the religious practices of the students. However, several months after the successful completion of this competition, the Board of Directors of the National High School Mock Trial Championship voted on October 15, 2005 to refuse any future accommodations for students who observe a Saturday Sabbath.

"This is unacceptable and violates the civil rights of these dedicated students who shouldn't have to choose between their faith and participating in this competition," said Rothman. "Students who have otherwise met all of the criteria to participate in the qualifying competitions leading to the National High School Mock Trial Championship should be able to compete regardless of their religious affiliation. I am hopeful that the bill I am introducing today will convince the board to fully open the doors of this competition to students of all religious faiths"

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