

Gov. Perry and Attorney General Abbott Press Conference (October 17, 2012)

PERRY: Thank you all for being here this morning and General Abbott and I welcome you. And we're here to talk about the efforts by a group of young Texans to express their beliefs. The core of what brings us here today is the simplest idea and the most fundamental of principles. In America people are free to express their religious freedom, their religious beliefs, and that basic tenet, that cherished freedom is so fundamental in the United States, it's frankly astonishing, General, that here in the 21st century we have to go to court to fight it. And in Texas we are fortunate indeed to have an attorney general who is willing to fight those battles and I applaud General Abbott, his staff for their efforts to support and liberate the people of our state to be able to worship, to, , make reference to their religion as they see fit. And with that General I'd like you just to weigh in...

ABBOTT: Well, first of all Governor I want to thank you for being involved in this, standing up for a principle that is a fundamental right for students in this state as well as Americans across this country. And to better defend the cheerleaders in Kountz, Texas, as well as students across the state of Texas, yesterday my office filed this motion to intervene in the Kountz cheerleader case to ensure their freedom of expression in Kountz, Texas. There is a reality here, and that is that the first amendment does not demand hostility toward religion, nor does it demand silence on the part of students in this state or in this country. It guarantees freedom of expression that these students were engaging in. There is a bigger picture issue here, however, and that is what started all this involving these Kountz cheerleaders

is that there was an atheist group from Wisconsin, who came into the state of Texas and tried to silence these students. We will not allow atheist groups from outside of the state of Texas to come into the state, to use menacing and misleading intimidation tactics, to try to bully schools to bow down at the altar of secular beliefs. We have a long history in my office of fighting against these kinds of efforts to trample religious expression in this state. You all know that I defended the ten commandments monument that stands just right outside of this capitol. On top of that I filed a brief on behalf of fifty state attorneys general, defending the phrase 'one nation, under god' in the United States pledge of allegiance. I then defended the constitutionality of a moment of silence in the state of Texas and the ability of Texas state students to recite the pledge of allegiance with the phrase 'one state, under god'. We also a year and a half ago got involved in the appellate version of a case at the Medina Valley Independent School District, where there was an effort by some group of agnostic parents who tried to prevent students from having a prayer at a high school graduation ceremony, who were offended by a invocation and a benediction. We took that to the 5th circuit prevailed at the intermediate stage allowing the students to proceed onward with that benediction. And then last year, at christmastime, I think it was this very same group, the Freedom From Religion Foundation, that tried to bully Henderson County in Athens, Texas into removing a nativity scene off of the county court grounds. There's a bottom line here, and that is the state of Texas is defending the United States Constitution and in this case involving these students the Texas Education Code, protecting the right of Texans to freely express their religious beliefs, and we are not going to either tolerate or

accept these atheist groups trying to prevent that freedom of expression here in the state of Texas.

PERRY: General, thank you, not only for myself but I am very sure that the cheerleaders in Kountz Texas would join me in saying thank you as well. The underlying problem here is that there's this very vocal, as you shared, and very litigious minority of American that are willing to legally attack anybody who dares to utter a phrase, a name that they don't agree with. In a twisting of logic many of these people insist on silencing (?) the religious people in the name of tolerance. I ask, What kind of tolerance is that? Where's the tolerance in threatening school officials, entire districts, simply because some cheerleaders at a football game want to put a biblical phrase on a banner? These students, or anyone for that matter, who's expressing their faith, they should be celebrated, from my perspective. In this day and age of instant gratification, this 'me first' culture that we see all too often, these young people are thinking about a world larger than themselves. They're attempting to inspire their fellow students, the adults around them as well. And instead the message they are being sent is to quiet down, button your lips, keep it to yourself. We're a nation that's built on the concept of free expression of ideas. We're also a culture built upon the concept that the original law is god's law, outlined in the ten commandments. There is a moral basis for the legal codes that you (Abbott) defend on a regular basis. And not just in this country but around the world. Somewhere along the way we lost our way, and not to mention our common sense, from my perspective. If you think about it, the Kountz cheerleaders simply wanted

to call a little attention to their faith and to their lord. Well they ultimately succeeded in that. There is a lot of attention being paid to what they're, what they're all about. Maybe more than they bargained for. But I know, General, you are proud to stand with them as am I, and let me just say that with that thought in mind, with what those young cheerleaders in Kountz, Texas did, that the lord does work in mysterious ways. So they're accomplishing their goal. You know as a government leader, we all owe the people of faith, people of all religions, the work to protect expressions of their faith, to ensure everyone has the right to voice their opinions and worship as they see fit. And during this upcoming session of the legislature I will continue to find ways to preserve those religious expressions and explore ways to protect people of faith from this ongoing onslaught. Any infringement upon the right is an insult to our great nation, and to those, for that matter, who have died to preserve and defend those expressions. And we will not, in this state, stand for that. So, General, again I want to say thank you for your continued strong, unwavering support of people of faith to express themselves in this state.