

# Rep. Allen: Religious overtones in flag raising

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Representative Allen today released the following statement regarding the flag controversy at the Capitol:

Flags are symbols. When raised over military fortifications and sometimes over government buildings they symbolize victory. Typically flags symbolize a unity of belief and engender a spirit of pride among those who identify with the flag.

Among those of different factions or beliefs a flag can stir up negative emotions or reactions.

Our government is founded upon principles of respecting minority interests. One of the reasons our constitution has the establishment clause is to protect minority groups who may hold a different set of beliefs and practices. It is an enduring American value to protect such groups of people from tyranny.

When popular opinion swells to support the interests of one group, regardless of history, we must remain mindful that all interests deserve protection. If the government sides with an interest, if it reveals devotion to a set of moral beliefs and practices, then it could be construed as religious.

Governor Evers actions this last week with regard to the multi-colored banner raised above the Capitol are, at a minimum, offensive to those who hold beliefs contrary to what that banner symbolizes. In that case the governor shows disdain for a group

of residents of the state of Wisconsin. The actions are divisive and unwise.

On a larger scale, if his actions are part of a cultural movement with ethical judgements and involving matters of conscience, the raising of the banner may be interpreted in a religious context. This action by the governor coincided with the annual ritual of Pride Fest in Milwaukee. Was the act of raising the flag over the Capitol an imposition of beliefs by government decree?

Based on the feedback I have received from my reaction to the governor's action, I get the sense that those who support the symbolic value of the movement's banner wish to impose their moral code governing the conduct of human affairs. That seems rather religious to me.

When the governor raised that flag over our Capitol and ordered it to be flown over all state buildings, he acted as the executive of the government, not as an individual expressing his own personal beliefs. This act goes beyond signing measures into law to protect individual rights. This is an act of government to impose a set of moral beliefs on people.

I fully support the right of individuals or groups to act in accordance with their own chosen beliefs as long as they do not injure the rights of others. I have always, and will always, defend those rights. To interpret my words or actions in this matter through a conjecture of my personal moral beliefs is an oversimplification.

Americans have the right to love. They should be free to do so in the manner that they deem appropriate without discrimination.

I oppose Governor Evers actions not because I am a Christian, but because I am an American. It is not the place of Government to raise a flag over government buildings that does not symbolize the unity of the people who are governed.

The humanism seemingly promoted by our governor violates its own tenants of tolerance and inclusion. Does it violate the establishment clause of the First

Amendment as well?