

Washington Window

Book Can Aid Students Understand Court Rule

By LYLE C. WILSON

WASHINGTON (UPI) — High schools from coast to coast are clamoring for copies of a paperback book that would help students understand this week's Supreme Court decision against prayer in classrooms.

The book is Thomas James Norton's "Constitution of the United States: Its Sources and Its Applications," published by the Committee for Constitutional Government Inc., 117 Liberty st., New York 6, N.Y.

The committee has from schools unfilled requests for 80,000 of Norton's book. From Pennsylvania, 33 schools have asked for 3,040 copies. Sixty-one Massachusetts schools have asked for 4,971 copies of Norton's book. Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, could use 11,000 copies.

The book consists of 319 pages, the major section being devoted to a line-by-line discussion of the U.S. Constitution. The last passage in Article VI, for example, provides "No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States."

This passage is followed by Norton's explanation of what it means and why it was written.

Article I of the Bill of Rights—the first 10 amendments to the Constitution—begins like this:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof . . ."

Gives Explanation

There follow several hundred words of Norton's explanation of that phraseology and why it is in the Constitution. Norton states that this prohibition against an established religion is against the nation and not against the states.

The foregoing are the constitutional provisions with respect to religion in the United States. It was on the basis of these provisions that the Supreme Court found that a prayer in a New York State elementary school was unconstitutional.

This book is a short course in basic government equal to a college course in civics if it is examined with care and interest. As Norton discusses the Constitution sentence by sentence, the student is led directly into the explanation of why and how the document was phrased as it is, and by whom.

There is no great gain in teaching Johnny to read if Johnny does not have handy those books he should read to establish in his mind love of country and comprehension of its basic institutions.