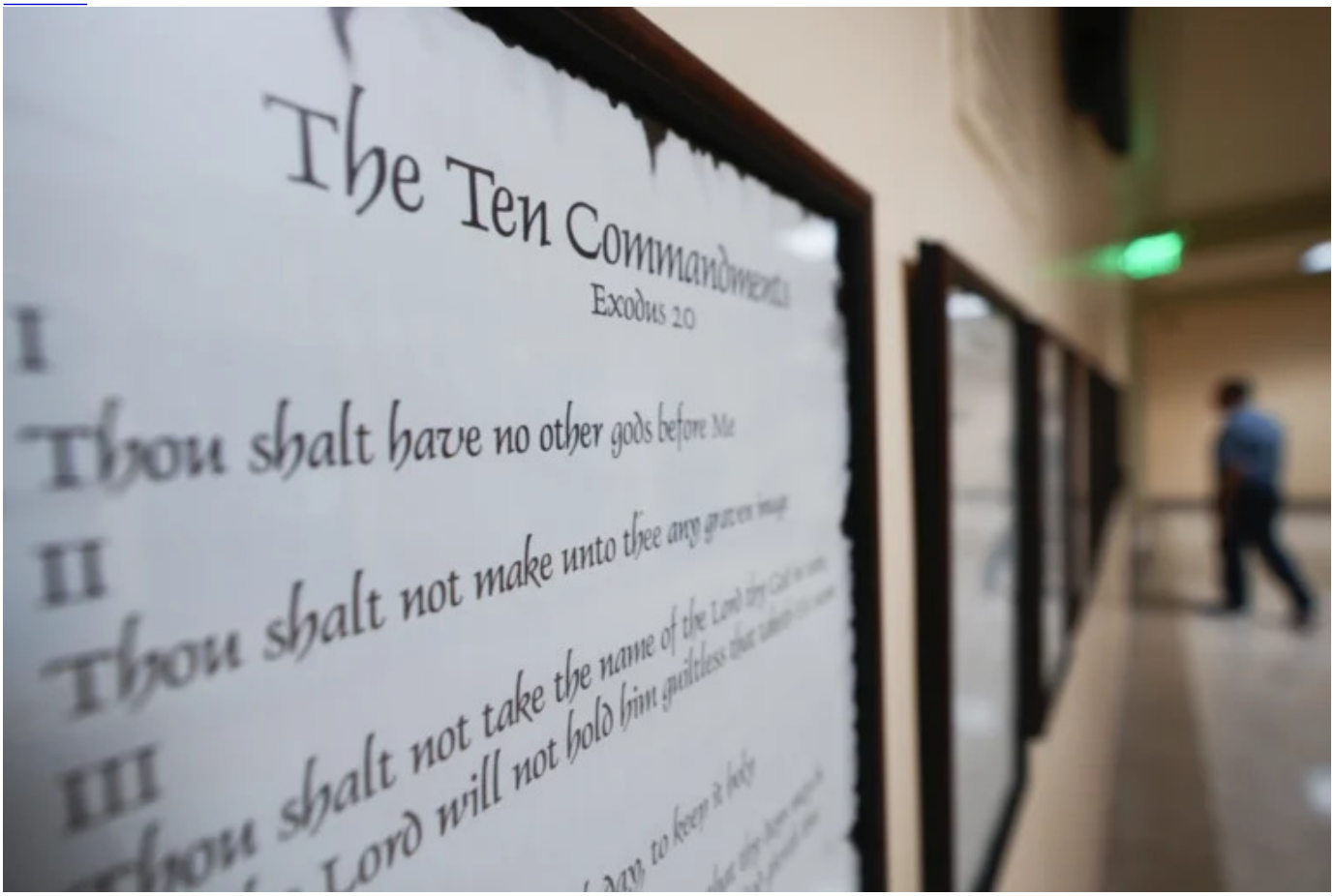
News



A copy of the Ten Commandments is posted along with other historical documents in a hallway of the Georgia Capitol on June 20, 2024, in Atlanta. (AP Photo/John Bazemore, File)

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An Arkansas law requiring that the Ten Commandments be prominently displayed in public school classrooms was struck down by a federal judge Monday.

The law is among those pushed by Republicans, including President Donald Trump, to incorporate religion in public schools. Arkansas, Louisiana and Texas all have enacted similar laws requiring the Ten Commandments be displayed in classrooms. And as such, each mandate has faced legal challenges that many expect to eventually be decided by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Here is a closer look at the status of the mandates, which have stirred the long-running debate over the role of religion in government institutions.

Federal court ruling blocks mandate in Arkansas, Republicans vow to appeal

Last year, seven Arkansas families of various religious and nonreligious backgrounds filed a lawsuit challenging the state's new law requiring all public elementary and secondary schools to display the Ten Commandments in every classroom and library. The lawsuit named six school districts in Arkansas as defendants.

While it is unclear how many school districts or publicly-funded universities have hung up posters, local media outlets have cited multiple examples over the past five months. That includes the Ten Commandments being posted at the University of Arkansas on the Fayetteville campus, the Arkansas Advocate reported in October.

Critics argue that the mandate is unconstitutional and violates separation of church and state. Proponents of the legislation say the Ten Commandments have historical significance and are part of the foundation of U.S.

On Monday, U.S. District Court Judge Timothy L. Brooks said in his written judgment that "nothing could possibly justify hanging the Ten Commandments—with or without historical context — in a calculus, chemistry, French, or woodworking class, to name a few."

Brooks, who was nominated by former President Barack Obama, went on to write that there is "no need to strain our minds to imagine a constitutional display

mandated" by the 2025 law; "One doesn't exist," he wrote.

While Brooks' judgment blocks the requirement, it's unclear how broadly his decision can be applied — if it is limited to the specific school districts named in the lawsuit or if it applies to the entire state. Megan Bailey a spokesperson for the American Civil Liberties Union of Arkansas, one of the groups representing the parents challenging the law, said the ruling "makes clear the law is unconstitutional."

"Given that, it would be unwise for any school district in Arkansas to move forward with posting the Ten Commandments," Bailey told The Associated Press.

Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders said in a statement that she plans to appeal the ruling and "defend our state's values."

Advertisement

Louisiana schools encouraged to hang up posters after most recent ruling

In 2024, Louisiana became the first state to mandate poster-sized displays of the Ten Commandments in every public school classroom, from kindergarten through college.

While the challenge has wound its way through federal courts for nearly two years, a ruling last month vacated an earlier court order that had prevented the law from taking effect — clearing the way for displays to be installed in classrooms.

Immediately following the Feb. 20 ruling from the full 5th U.S. Circuit of Appeals, Gov. Jeff Landry instructed schools to follow the law and post the Ten Commandments. In a letter to educators, Landry wrote that the court's decision "removes any obstacles to the implementation of Louisiana's Ten Commandments law" and that schools "should now proceed with placing the posters in classrooms."

The law requires schools to accept donated Ten Commandments posters, which must have "large, easily readable font." Earlier this year, a conservative advocacy group, Louisiana Family Forum, sent posters to most of the state's parish school systems, The New Orleans Advocate/The Times-Picayune reported.

There have not yet been widespread reports of schools hanging up the posters, with some school officials expressing worries about potential litigation. However, others say it is imminent. Among them is Louisiana State University President Wade Rousse, who said the university intends to comply with the law but, as of last week, has not received donated posters.

Posters go up in Texas classrooms

Last year, a similar mandate in Texas took effect — marking the widest-reaching attempt in the nation to hang the Ten Commandments in public schools.

With no shortage of strong opinions among teachers, parents, and students, the posters began going up in classrooms as school districts accepted donations or paid to have them printed. About two dozen of the state's roughly 1,200 school districts were barred from hanging the posters after federal judges issued injunctions in cases against the law.

In January, the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals heard arguments over the Texas law and litigation is pending.