

## Rothman's Resolution to End Discrimination in National High School Mock Trial Championships Passes

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In Support of Religious Freedom

House Unanimously Approves Rep. Rothman's Resolution Calling on the National High School Mock Trial Championships to Allow Equal Participation

(Washington, DC)â€”Today, the U.S. House of Representatives unanimously approved Congressman Steve Rothman's (D-Fair Lawn) legislation (H.Res.25) calling on the Board of Directors of the National High School Mock Trial Championships to accommodate students of all faiths to allow them participate in this annual competition without violating the practices of their religion. Rothman first introduced his legislation in 2005 after the Board initially made satisfactory accommodations to allow students from the Torah Academy of Teaneck, an Orthodox Jewish school, to compete without violating their religious practices, but then voted to never again alter its schedule to accommodate religious students who observe the Sabbath from sundown on Friday through sundown on Saturday.

"The Board's decision to never make these kinds of accommodations again was unreasonable and unjust. The decision discriminates against Jewish, Muslim, and Seventh-Day Adventist students. It is exactly the wrong message for an educational group dedicated to teaching students about 'justice for all' to send," said Rothman.

Despite initial unwillingness by the Board, the matches involving Torah Academy in May 2005 were ultimately re-scheduled in such a manner that all participants were able to compete without inconveniencing any of the other student groups or disrupting the competition as a whole. Students, teachers, and administrators associated with the competition overwhelmingly supported the decision, with one teacher saying: "The compromise demonstrated fairness, tolerance, and problem-solving, all values that I try to encourage in my students."

However, in October 2005 the Board voted to never make such accommodations again, which prompted two state teams to withdraw in protest, the New Jersey Bar Association and the North Carolina Academy of Trial Lawyers. They then started an alternative mock trial competition that makes accommodations for religious students, the American Mock Trial Invitational (AMTI).

Rep. Rothman has commended the creation of the AMTI, saying: "I am extremely pleased that the American Mock Trial Invitational exists. It was founded on the just principles of tolerance and fairness that I believe should become standard practice."

In urging his colleagues to support H.Res.25, Rep. Rothman said: "It is outrageous that the national mock trial competitionâ€”which was founded, organized and underwritten by lawyers, judges and bar associations from around the United Statesâ€”should be so insensitive to fundamental questions of equal protection and the rights of religious minorities to full and fair participation in what purports to be a contest between the best high school students in the entire country. To express this House's strong disapproval of the Board's refusal to accommodate all eligible students, I urge all the members of the House to join me in supporting House Resolution 25."

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Previous releases on this issue:

- Rothman Addresses Over 100 High School Participants at the Second Annual American Mock Trial Invitational (May 11, 2007)
  
- As Mock Trial Championships Begin, Rothman Renews Call to Allow Students of All Faiths to Compete (May 12, 2006)
  
- Rothman Introduces Bill Calling On National Mock Trial Competition to Let Children of All Faiths Compete (December 14, 2005)