

## Why Recite the Pledge of Allegiance?



**O**NCE during a political campaign I visited in the same week a conservative Tea Party group and a progressive Democratic caucus, and was struck by the fact that both began their meetings with an earnest recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. Here are points to consider in favor of making this practice more common today.

1. It is a ceremony, and we need more ceremonies today.
2. Its main point is to publicly affirm ones allegiance to our republic. The word republic comes from Latin (*res publica*) which simply means 'the public thing.' The Pledge of Allegiance expresses ones personal commitment to a nation of people united in affection and purpose.
3. Our common purpose is an experiment in creating a 'land of the free', and, along with this, in forming and improving an effective and just government of the people, by the people, for the people.
4. The flag is merely a visible symbol of the invisible moral and spiritual bond which unites us as Americans. It is the nature of love to draw together and unite. The Pledge of Allegiance, then, is a statement of ones love of ones fellow citizens. Love has nothing to do with boasting, swaggering, aggression, or conquest; it is mistaken to associate the flag with such things.
5. We affirm that we are indivisible. This is an urgent message in the present times of bitter partisanship and internal strife. The truth is that is our welfare and very survival depend on our unity, and on recognition that we are, in fact, an indivisible community. Saying it aloud helps underscore this vital principle in our minds.
6. To recite the Pledge does not, per se, produce excessive nationalism or jingoism. We have a moral duty to all human beings, in all nations. We strive together as a nation to support the global good. Working with other Americans we may contribute to humanity better than we can individually.
7. We do not pledge allegiance to the government. The government is merely an administrative

organ of our nation, and serves the American people, to whom we bear our true allegiance. One of our essential duties as Americans is to remain vigilant against oppressive government. One way governments oppress citizens is by dividing them against each other. Our solidarity is our best defense against abusive government.

8. It goes without saying that nobody should be or feel coerced to say the Pledge of Allegiance. Neither should they be required to stand during its recitation.

9. Similarly, saying the words "under God" should be left to the discretion of each person. These words were not in the original formulation of the Pledge. Even the devout religious may agree there is some question about their inclusion here, where they both literally and in effect disjoin "one Nation" and "indivisible," the connection of which is the most important affirmation in the Pledge. We honor God more by our unity than by words.

10. To commence a candidates forum with a recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance is especially apt: it helps produce a suitably dignified tone to proceedings and establishes a context of cooperation, mutual respect and trust; it reminds us of the urgent need for unity; it draws us closer to one another as we see that all present are motivated by genuine devotion to country and community. It serves to rededicate us in our common mission to form a more just and virtuous society; with this, our overriding goal, and the value of each individual towards its accomplishment, more clearly in view, we may then approach proceedings in a positive, generous, collegial spirit, and avoid a mere clamoring of opposing factions.

30 March 2016