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## Inglis under fire from fellow conservatives

**Kelli Gavant, Washington Correspondent**

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis, R-S.C., broke with his party this week and blocked a bill that would safeguard the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Inglis was the sole Republican to vote against sending the bill from the House Judiciary Committee to the House floor. He joined the committee's 14 Democrats, thus not only thwarting the bill but drawing criticism from his own party.

Twice last week the bill failed to receive the support of a simple majority on a committee where there are six more Republicans than Democrats. Because several Republicans weren't at the committee meetings to vote, the Democrats were able to defeat the bill when joined by Inglis.

Without committee approval, the measure cannot be considered by the full House.

The Pledge Protection Act would strip federal court jurisdiction over cases involving the pledge. It is a response to a 2002 federal appeals court ruling finding the pledge is unconstitutional because it contains the "under God" phrase.

The bill is part of the GOP's "American Values Agenda" that aims to rally support for the party before the midterm elections. The bill passed the House in 2004, but stalled in the

Senate. Inglis' vote this week could shelve the legislation for this year.

"It's a bill with the right motive, but the wrong method," Inglis said. "I generally start with the notion that it's a bad idea to strip the federal courts of the ability to decide federal constitutional claims."

He added that it would force litigants to go before state courts in cases involving the pledge and prevent them from appealing to a federal court.

"It would be getting the courts off (the) back of those who want to say 'under God,' but leaving them in the clutches of the state courts ... I think it's the case of a law of unintended consequences."

Rep. F. James Sensenbrenner Jr., R-Wis., chair of the committee, brought the bill to a vote on Wednesday and tried again Thursday.

"He hoped it would report out of committee favorably," said Jeff Lungren, spokesman for the committee. "He was disappointed."

Inglis' vote put the conservative lawmaker in the unusual position this week of drawing praise from some liberal organizations and scorn from some conservative ones.

"This is a tremendous victory," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, in a news release. "A proposal this at odds with our system of government should never have come up for a vote to begin with."

Inglis said he was concerned about the precedent such a move would set.

"A future liberal Congress could think this court stripping idea is pretty good," he said, citing a hypothetical example that Democrats could try to deny federal courts the right to hear cases about distributing religious materials.

"We need a fully empowered federal court system to decide difficult cases involving federal constitution laws," Inglis said.

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