

Should the Wisconsin Capitol tree be Christmas tree?

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GREEN BAY - State Rep. Jim Steineke, R-Vandenbroek, has introduced a resolution to rename the Capitol Holiday Tree the Capitol Christmas Tree.

"It is what it is, it's a Christmas tree," Steineke said Tuesday. "I just think that in Wisconsin we called it a Christmas tree for 70 years. We call it a Christmas tree in Washington at the White House. I don't see any harm in calling it a Christmas tree in Madison, Wisconsin."

Sounds simple enough. Or is it?

What if you are not a Christian? Maybe you are a Native American and choose to practice your traditional beliefs. Or a Jew, or a Muslim? What if you just plain don't believe in religion at all? Many estimate that up to 40% of Americans do not believe in the traditional concept of a god, though most choose to not to talk about it among believers.

Should the State use your tax dollars to ram someone else's religion down your throat?

When I was with Milwaukee County, we set up a big tree in the courthouse and a variety of little trees in several departments, including Human Resources, at this time of year. The County Executive would come down and make a speech. Several employees would spend hours decorating the tree in our department, usually on a Friday afternoon. Everyone was nice.

But wouldn't you rather they spent their time processing your job application? Or doing any other kind of real work? If they wanted a Christmas tree, they were certainly free to set one up at home.

Every year, for our friends in the GOP like Rep. Steineke, the Christmas versus Holiday tree issue provides a perfect opportunity to pander to their base. Here we create another “issue” that sounds simple if you don’t really think about it. “The governor believes a Christmas tree should be called a Christmas tree,” Chris Schrimpf, Scott Walker’s communications director, said in an email Tuesday.

But is it that “simple”, or does it only seem so if you believe that everyone should share your particular beliefs. Maybe Scotty and friends are just trying to give their supporters the impression that they are “standing up for them” in Madison. It is certainly easier than doing any real work, like creating more jobs in Wisconsin.

Yes, this is an issue that is not an issue. And the “it’s a tradition” argument has been used too often to support too many practices that should have been forgotten years ago.

Maybe we should just let all the practicing Christians have their Christmas trees at home. Religion is supposed to be an individual preference, isn’t it?

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