

Senators push for Bill of Rights display at Oklahoma Capitol

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OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Weeks after a Ten Commandments monument was removed from its foundation at the Oklahoma Capitol under a court order, a bipartisan pair of state senators announced plans Monday to push for a display they hope will be much less controversial the Bill of Rights.

Sen. Patrick Anderson, R Enid, and Democratic Leader Sen. John Sparks, D Norman, said they're partnering on a bill that would authorize a privately funded display on the Capitol grounds.

Anderson wrote similar bills in previous sessions, but said he was asked by leadership to delay final passage until a lawsuit challenging a Ten Commandments monument at the Capitol had been resolved. The Oklahoma Supreme Court ruled in that case the monument had to be removed because it violated a constitutional ban on the use of state property to support a religious message.

"I can't imagine anyone would be offended by the placement of a monument to the Bill of Rights on the Capitol grounds," Anderson said.

The Bill of Rights refers to the first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution, including the right to freedom of speech, the right to keep and bear arms and the right to be secure from unreasonable searches and seizures.

The effort is part of a national push by the group My Bill of Rights to install such displays around the country. A \$500,000 display already has been constructed in Arizona, and another \$2 million project is planned for outside the Texas Supreme Court, said the group's Executive Director Chris Bliss.

"What better place to put the Bill of Rights than in front of the Supreme Court building," Bliss said.

A longtime standup comedian and renowned juggler, Bliss said he launched the initiative more than a decade ago after becoming distraught over how vitriolic he thought political discourse had become in the U.S.

"I was looking for a common ground project," Bliss said.

Bliss plans to join Sparks and Anderson for a press conference in Oklahoma City on Tuesday, which is national Bill of Rights Day.

Bliss said the state Capitol is an ideal location for such a monument, since the critical part of our nation's history will be on display for thousands of schoolchildren who visit the Capitol each year.

"Great ideas make a great nation, and this is obviously a great set of ideas," Bliss said.