

## HAF retains California firm in textbook controversy

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**T**HE Hindu American Foundation (HAF) has retained Sacramento-based law firm Olson, Hagel and Fishburn, LLP, as its representatives to impress upon the California State Board of Education (SBE) to carry out several edits and corrections in textbooks on Hinduism for public school students. California state textbooks come up for review every six years and this year the sixth grade texts relating to ancient India history are under review.

HAF said it retained the counsels because it didn't get any feedback from the office of the SBE despite repeated attempts. "We are fully cognizant of how strongly our constituents feel about the textbook issue, and we at HAF are determined to utilize every possible option to ensure that the SBE process remains fair and impartial for Hindu Americans," said Suhag Shukla, Esq., Legal Counsel of HAF.

The Vedic Foundation (VF) and Hindu Education Foundation (HEF) had earlier submitted extensive edits as part of a lengthy review process conducted by SBE and the California Curriculum Commission, an advisory body to the State Board of Education. HAF too joined the protests when there was a widespread feeling among its constituents that the SBE and its staff failed to adequately address a substantial number of the VF and HEF edits, and improperly allowed certain individuals to undermine the proce-

dures available for public debate and resolution of these issues. The three foundations were further disappointed when they were not invited to a meeting on January 6. The meeting apparently reopened and reviewed previous recommendations of the Curriculum Commission.

Although the SBE is expected to take the final decision on the matter after a meeting in February, attorneys representing HAF are planning to appear at the SBE meeting on January 12 and provide Board members with the attached statement.

"We believe that the Curriculum Commission of the California State Board of Education made its recommendations to the SBE based on an accurate understanding of science, history and the sentiments of those people in California that actually practice the Hindu faith being taught in schools," said Shukla. "It was completely inappropriate and we believe that it was illegal on the part of the staff and Board members of the SBE to modify these recommendations at a closed-door meeting. HAF is committed to ensure that a fair and open process is followed, and the decision to retain counsel on this matter reflects our concern that the appropriate process is perhaps not being followed in this case."

The Sacramento-based law firm will handle communication with the SBE on behalf of HAF and ensure that the concerns of the Hindu American community regarding the portrayal of Hinduism in textbooks are conveyed.

Meanwhile, the attorneys at HAF continue to provide background material, the context of the current controversy and perspectives of the Hindu American community to the law firm.

"Hindus throughout the US are watching this process with concern since the results have broad implications for all Hindus. For many years, Hinduism was taught from a non-Hindu perspective. All that we are asking is that Hinduism be taught as per State law, which asks that the education 'instill in each child a sense of pride in his or her heritage; develop a feeling of self-worth...; eradicate the roots of prejudice... and enable all students to become aware and accept religious diversity while being allowed to remain secure in any religious beliefs they may already have,'" said Mihir Meghani, president of HAF.

Meanwhile, there has been widespread criticism to the 'political' agenda of the Foundation. A number of bodies have suggested that the proposed changes reflect the "supremacist and chauvinistic political agendas" of the foundations and that they are seeking to equate the history of India with the history of Hinduism and the "living diverse religion of Hinduism with a Brahminical, Vedic religion frozen in time for thousands of years."

Many have also suggested that the HEF and VF have managed to get the Curriculum Commission to agree to a large number of their suggested changes in alignment with their Hindu "supremacist ideology".

## INDIA IN THE WEST



Saree draping class to Cupertino city Official at India Festival 2005. Photo by Sam Rao

