

Declaration of Reverend Roger Butts

I, Roger Butts, do hereby declare:

1. I am an ordained Unitarian Universalist minister. I worked as a minister for a decade, including three years in Colorado Springs. My ministry's focus has always been social justice and peace. I am currently working as an organizer for Coloradans for Alternatives to the Death Penalty.

2. Several times a week, I walk in Colorado Springs' central downtown corridor, through the heart of what is currently the no-solicitation zone.

Sometimes homeless and poor people ask me for assistance. I want to hear these requests for help.

They remind me that there are many people in Colorado Springs who are homeless or very poor, and need my help. This message, that extreme poverty exists in our country, is one that our society is generally reluctant to acknowledge. The discomfort with this message and the issues it represents means that the voices of the homeless and very poor are seldom heard. Yet, I feel that what they have to say about themselves and about our society is very important.

3. I often participate in ongoing debates and discussions concerning political and social issues in America. I believe that discussions about poverty in America are crucial to our society. I believe these discussions are significantly enhanced by messages of need provided by the homeless and the very poor. As a participant in such discussions, therefore, I am interested in assuring that the homeless and very poor are allowed to continue communicating their message of need.

4. I do not believe the government has the right to forbid poor people from communicating with others in public places about their need. I believe all people, perhaps especially the least among us, have a right to show their face to the public, to tell their story, and to ask for help. And I do not believe the government has the right to deny me the opportunity to listen to pleas for help from less fortunate people.
5. Although the City Council has made clear that the intent of the solicitation ban is to rid downtown of panhandlers, it is deeply concerning to me that the ordinance also bans so much other communication – like that of street musicians and political action organizations.
6. I love listening to street musicians, and I am saddened and angered that the solicitation ban will deny me the opportunity to hear their music out in the streets and the parks of downtown Colorado Springs. I listen to street musicians frequently in downtown Colorado Springs, and I sometimes give them money. I am aware that if street musicians are not permitted to ask for money for their music, then they will not continue to play their music for the public. I want to hear the street musicians in the downtown corridor, and I want to have the opportunity to give the musicians money on occasion to show my appreciation for their music. I do not believe the government has or should have the right to deny street musicians the opportunity to seek remuneration when they play their music in our public spaces, just as I do not think the government has the right to deny

me the opportunity to hear these musicians and contribute money in exchange for their music.

7. I also understand the solicitation ban will prohibit advocacy organizations from fundraising in the central downtown corridor. When walking downtown, I often see individuals seeking donations to further a political movement or non-profit organization, including the Occupy movement and Greenpeace. I commonly interact with individuals soliciting funds downtown for these political purposes. I do so to learn more about their mission, and sometimes I decide to make a donation. I want to continue to receive requests for donations from advocacy groups.

8. I believe the presence of advocacy groups, as well musicians and other artists, in our public streets is important to Colorado Spring's social fabric. The solicitation ban will deprive our downtown visitors of some important opportunities to experience, engage in political discourse, and join in community activism.

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct.

11-20-2012
Date

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