

I 'Like' the Constitution

By Reg P. Wydeven
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As a kid, one of my favorite shows was 'Three's Company.' I loved watching John Ritter's pratfalls as Jack Tripper, and also his hilarious interactions with his landlords – first Norman Fell's Stanley Roper and later Don Knotts' Ralph Furley. Of course, I also enjoyed watching Suzanne Somers' Christmas, or Chrissy, Snow and her typically short shorts.

Apparently inspired by Farah Fawcett's brilliant move of leaving 'Charlie's Angels,' Somers also decided she was bigger than her show and demanded a huge pay raise and a share of the show's profits. Her contract was not renewed and the show ran for another three seasons.

Long before her Thigh Master infomercial fame of the 1990s, however, Somers made her triumphant return to network television in 1987 as the star of the syndicated sitcom 'She's the Sheriff.' Somers starred as Hildy Granger, a young woman suddenly widowed with two children to raise. In a wacky twist of fate, Hildy takes over her dead husband's job as sheriff of Lakes County, Nevada.

Hildy had to juggle raising two kids as a single mom, dealing with the hijinks of Lake Tahoe's locals and tourists, and overseeing a motley crew of deputies. One of the deputies, Max Rubin, constantly causes headaches for Hildy, as he feels she unjustly received the job that he deserved.

Clearly, Max didn't like Sheriff Granger. Viewers must not have either, because the show was canceled after two seasons. TV Guide also clearly didn't like 'She's the Sheriff,' since it ranked the sitcom #44 on its list of the "50 Worst TV Shows of All Time."

When people don't like Hampton County, Virginia, Sheriff B.J. Roberts, he simply fires them.

In 2009, Roberts was re-elected as sheriff and promptly fired six employees after the election. He fired these employees for "liking" the Facebook page of his opponent, titled "Jim Adams for Hampton Sheriff."

In response, Daniel Ray Carter Jr., one of the fired deputies, sued Roberts for wrongful termination, claiming that clicking on the 'thumbs-up' logo on Adams' Facebook page, indicating he 'likes' it, is protected by his First Amendment right to free speech.

U.S. District Court Judge Raymond A. Jackson disagreed, however, claiming your right to freedom of speech can't be violated if you didn't say anything. "Liking a Facebook page is insufficient speech to merit constitutional protection," Jackson's ruling held, because it doesn't "involve actual statements."

Carter appealed Jackson's decision to the U.S. Court of Appeals. The case has garnered national attention due to the huge usage of social media and the potential implications that such use can have on Constitutional rights.

Carter has garnered support from the American Civil Liberties Union. In a supporting brief, Aden Fine, a senior staff attorney with the ACLU, claims that, "The judge is wrong in the sense that the Facebook button actually says the word 'like,' so there are actually words being used." The brief goes on to say that, "there's a thumbs-up symbol, which most people understand means they, literally, like something."

Facebook also threw in its support by submitting a brief that asserts a "like" for a political candidate is "the 21st-century equivalent of a front-yard campaign sign." The brief proclaims that, "A campaign endorsement in particular need not be elaborate or lengthy to constitute political speech." Facebook's attorneys elaborated by saying, "Carter need not have published a detailed analysis of the competing candidates' platforms for his speech to warrant First Amendment protection. His endorsement of his preferred candidate is enough."

It may take several months for the appellate court to render a decision.

I don't know about Sheriff Roberts, but I'm pretty sure more people would have liked Sheriff Granger if Suzanne Somers would have stuck with her short shorts.

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