

Oklahoma Schools Need 55,000 Bibles. Trump-Endorsed Book Fits the Bill.

The bid details for new Bibles the state is buying seem to point to a version promoted by former President Donald J. Trump.



By Stephanie Saul

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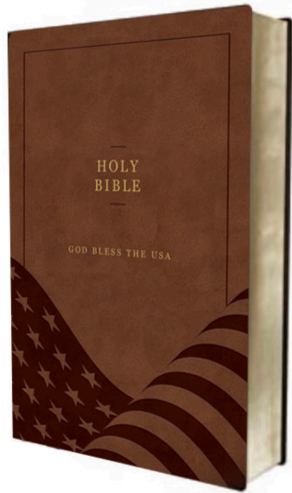
When the education superintendent of Oklahoma, Ryan Walters, ordered this year that every public school classroom in the state must have a Bible in the classroom, he didn't mention any special requirements.

But bid specifications for the Bibles, released this week, contain several narrowly drawn and unusual details. They must, for example, include text of the Pledge of Allegiance, the U.S. Constitution and other historical documents not normally included in the Bible.

What Bible fits the bill? The country music star Lee Greenwood's God Bless the U.S.A. Bible, which is endorsed by former President Donald J. Trump and costs \$60, far above the average price for Bibles. Mr. Trump receives royalties from their sales; financial disclosure reports filed in August show he has made \$300,000 from the Bible since endorsing it.

The specifications caught the eye of Oklahoma Watch, a nonprofit news organization, which first reported this week that the bid specs seemed tailored to steer the state's selection toward one Bible. Among other requirements, the bid rules require King James Version Bibles that are bound by leather or leather-like material.

About 20 million copies of the Bible are sold each year in the United States, and some printed versions are available for under \$5. But each copy of Mr. Greenwood's Bible includes a handwritten version of the chorus of his song "God Bless the U.S.A.," a frequent anthem at Trump rallies. It also includes copies of the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the Declaration of Independence and the Pledge of Allegiance. And it is bound in brown leather.



The God Bless the U.S.A. Bible fits the specifications that Oklahoma's Department of Education laid out in its bid for Bibles this fall.

Mr. Trump had posted his endorsement of Mr. Greenwood's Bible to his social media feeds just before Easter. It is one of several ventures the former president has embarked on in recent months as his legal bills mount from his court cases. Earlier this year, Mr. Trump hawked \$399 gold sneakers, and in August he began promoting a new cryptocurrency business.

Oklahoma is looking for 55,000 Bibles, a big contract worth about \$3 million. (Last month, Mr. Walters, a Christian conservative and former history teacher, said the state would ask the Legislature for money to buy Bibles.)

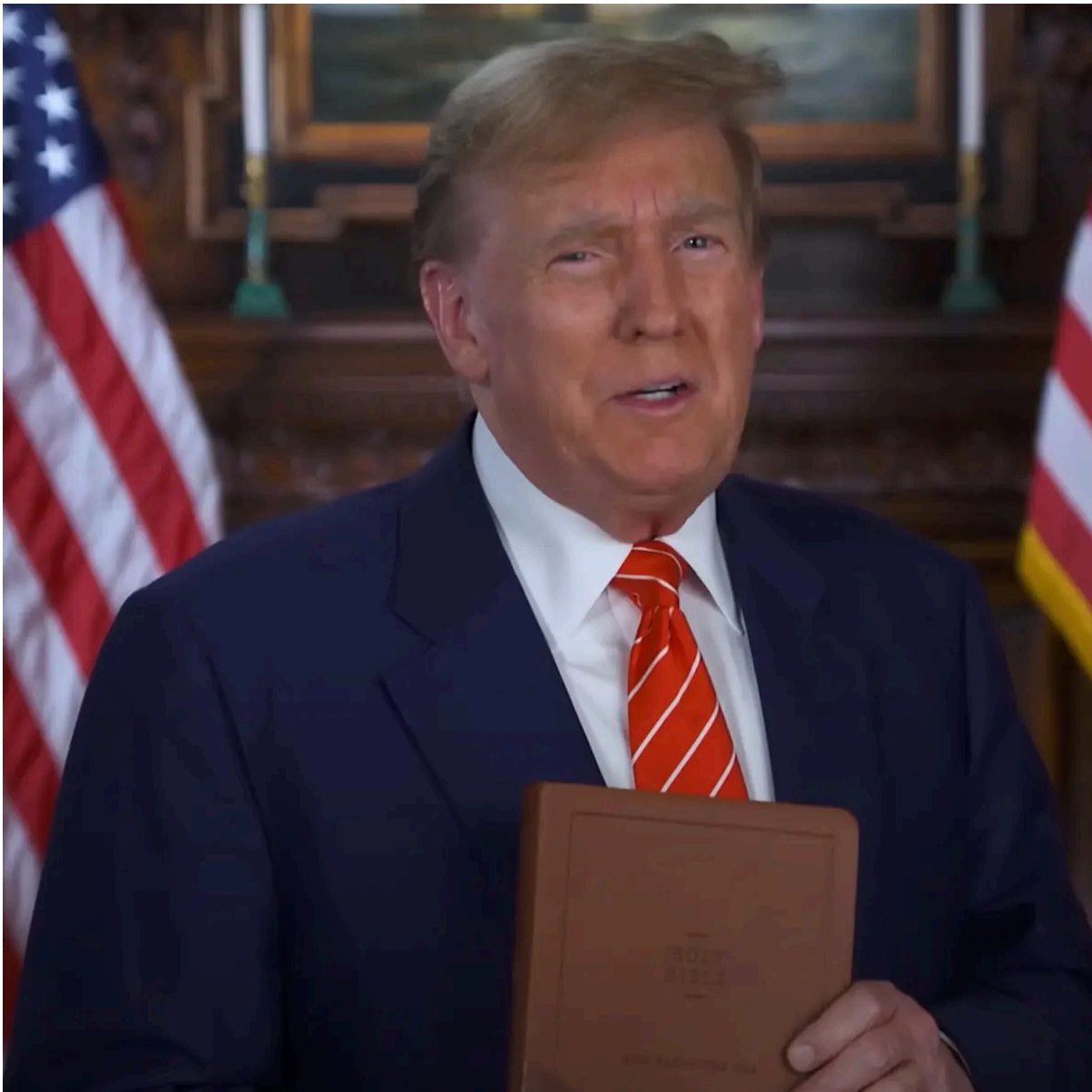
A spokesman for the Department of Education, Dan Isett, released a statement Friday saying that Mr. Walters was committed "to an open and transparent R.F.P. process, consistent with the norms for state procurement, that will be adequate to meet the needs of Oklahoma classrooms."

Mr. Isett said that there were “hundreds of Bible publishers and we expect a robust competition for this proposal.”

But an advocacy group, the Oklahoma Appleseed Center for Law and Justice, raised questions about the bid specifications.

“The R.F.P. on its face seems fair, but with additional scrutiny we can see there are very few Bibles on the market that would meet these criteria, and all of them have been endorsed by former President Donald Trump,” Colleen McCarty, the organization’s executive director, said in a statement.

She accused Mr. Walters of continuing to “waste taxpayer money on unconstitutional endeavors designed to draw litigation in pursuit of his political ambitions.”



Former President Donald J. Trump in a video promoting the God Bless the U.S.A. Bible. via YouTube

Legal experts had raised questions about whether Mr. Walters's broad mandate — which requires the Bible to be taught in classrooms — would create a legal quagmire for the state, particularly if parents were opposed to having children taught religion. And many school districts have said they would not comply.

Some conservative Christians are also uncomfortable with the mandate, saying homes and churches are more appropriate places for children to learn about religion. Republican state lawmakers, too, have raised questions about Mr. Walters's stewardship of the education agency.