The News Tribune

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Ever Striving for the Treasure Coast to be a better place to live.

A Freedom Newspaper

This newspaper is dedicated to furnishing information to our readers so that they can better promote and preserve their own freedom and encourage others to see its blessings. Only when man is free to control himself and all he produces, can he develop to his utmost capabilities.

We believe that freedom is a gift from God and not a political grant from government. Freedom is neither license nor anarchy. It is self-control. No more. No less. It must be consistent with the truths expressed in such great moral guides as the Coveting Commandment, the Golden Rule and the Declaration of Independence.

Let peace begin with me.

JAMES J. McMILLEN, *publisher*
ROBERT N. ENNS, *executive editor*

The long nose of the court

With a wink and a nod, the U.S. Supreme Court has given its blessing to federal bureaucrats eager to stick their long arms and fingers into the pockets of members of the Arkansas-based Alamo Foundation.

The court said that Alamo — reognized by the IRS as a religious organization — must abide by federal labor laws and that its ''volunteer workers'' must be paid minimum wage and overtime pay, or the equivalent in free lodging, meals, health care and other benefits. Conveniently, that ruling also means the volunteers would be subject to withholding taxes — so the government gets ''its'' cut first.

The case was not brought by a disgruntled ''volunteer'' worker, but by the federal government, unhappy that Alamo was not complying with various record-keeping requirements of the federal Fair Labor Standards Act.

The foundation does not solicit financial contributions from the public, but instead receives much of its income from the various businesses it runs, such as the Alamo Discount Grocery, Alamo Construction, Alamo Auto Repair and Fort Smith Mobile Nursery. These businesses — and their workers — were the reason for the Supreme Court case.

In return for their working a 60-hour week or longer, the foundation had provided the 300 or so ''associates'' with food, clothing, shelter and medical and child care. The court placed a value on that compensation of $200 per month. There were no cash salaries.

Alamo had argued that the record-keeping requirements attached to cash payments would ''lead to excessive government entanglement with religion'' and that the federal government had no right to impose its views of adequate compensation on workers willing to settle for what Alamo offered.

In fact, volunteer after volunteer took the stand in Alamo's defense, saying they never expected to receive monetary compensation and would be offended if money were offered. Justice Byron White, however, writing for the unanimous court, said such arguments were irrelevant.

To be sure, the Alamo setup is hardly the norm. We know few people who would accept such compensation. The specific relevant question, however, is whether Alamo's ''associates'' were coerced into the arrangement. The larger question is whether this is a society willing to tolerate unusual or offbeat ways people choose to lead their lives.

The case didn't turn on the question of coercion. White argued that if an exception were made for Alamo, its compensation package ''would be likely to exert a general downward pressure on wages in competing businesses.'' Thus the court implicitly affirmed the doctrine that workers have a ''right'' to wages greater than they might be willing to accept.

There is no such ''right.'' Wages, like prices between competing businesses, should be of concern only to those businesses, their workers and their customers. If wages are too low, the workers will go elsewhere. If wages are too high, the business will not survive. Those choices rightfully belong to the people involved, not to the Supreme Court.