

# VERBATIM

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

While many have depicted the Republican candidate and Tea Party darling Christine O'Donnell as ignorant of the US constitution, conservative commentators say otherwise. It's not that O'Donnell did not know that the First Amendment prohibits the federal establishment of religion, they say, she was just disputing its interpretation while debating her Democrat opponent, Chris Coons, this week.

**O'Donnell:** You have just stated that you will impose your will over the local school district and that is a blatant violation of our constitution.

**Coons:** To be clear, Ms O'Donnell, I believe that creationism is religious doctrine and evolution is broadly accepted.

**O'Donnell:** And what do you think of intelligent design?

**Coons:** Creationism ... [and] intelligent design are religious doctrine, evolution is widely accepted, well-defended scientific fact and ... public schools should be teaching broadly accepted scientific fact, not religious doctrine.

**O'Donnell:** Well, you just proved how little you know about constitutional law and the theory of evolution, because the theory of evolution is not a fact. It is a theory and if local school districts want to give that theory equal credence with intelligent design it is their right ... The reason we are in the mess we are in is because our so-called leaders in Washington no longer view the indispensable

principles of our founding as truly that, indispensable.

**Coons:** One of those indispensable principles is the separation of church and state.

**Christine:** Where in the constitution is the separation of church and state? [Audience laughter]

**Coons:** ... I ... think you have just heard from my opponent in her attempt at saying "where is the separation of church and state in the constitution" [which] reveals her fundamental misunderstanding of what our constitution is, how it is amended and how it evolves. The First Amendment - *the First Amendment* - establishes the separation, the fact that the federal government shall not establish any religion, in decisional law of the Supreme Court over many, many decades.

**O'Donnell:** The First Amendment does?

**Coons:** It clarifies and enshrines there is a separation of church and state that our courts and our law must respect.

**O'Donnell:** So you are telling me separation of church and state is found in our First Amendment?

**Coons:** It is important in modern times to apply the constitution as it exists today, and as it is interpreted by our justices, and if there are settled pieces of constitutional law like the separation of church and state, like the individual right to reproductive freedom that *Roe versus Wade* represents, that we have lived with and have lived under for decades, in



my view it is important to know whether you have on my side a candidate who believes and supports these things and on the other side a candidate who does not believe it and who does not support these things.

**O'Donnell:** Let me just clarify, you are telling me that the separation of

church and state is found in the First Amendment?

**Coons:** It bars Congress from making laws respecting the establishment of religion.

**O'Donnell:** That is in the First Amendment?

**Coons:** It is.