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Flotilla of 30 boats carrying Scientologists and their supporters arrives in Sacramento before protest rally at Capitol.

## Scientologists sail protest to Capitol

SACRAMENTO (AP) — About 500 protesters went to the Capitol yesterday to demand exemption of churches from punitive damages in lawsuits.

The Church of Scientology members and sympathizers sang songs from the 1960s black freedom protests in the South as they arrived in port after a 120-mile trip from San Francisco. A 78-foot sailing ship and others in the 30-vessel armada sported banners like, "The Sun Never Sets on Scientology."

Clad in T-shirts proclaiming the effort a "Religious Freedom Crusade," they marched six abreast for a mile through central Sacramento chanting, "Religious Freedom Now," and waving placards such as, "Your Church Could Be Next."

At the Capitol, the Rev. Ken Hoden of the Los Angeles Church

of Scientology told demonstrators: "We're here at the seat of government to tell them we want to be free, as they are, from the fear of punishment (through court-awarded punitive damages)."

Hoden, who is president of the California section of the Church of Scientology, told reporters the protest was prompted by a Los Angeles Superior Court case involving a former member who sued, claiming he did not receive the organization's benefits as promised and that it had interfered with his business.

The jury voted a \$30 million damage award, \$25 million of which was punitive. The organization is appealing the verdict.

Hoden said the Capitol rally, and previous demonstrations this week in San Francisco and other California cities, kicked off a campaign to win passage of a state

Senate measure next year that would exempt organized religions from punitive damages.

State Sen. John Doolittle told reporters he plans to introduce the measure, but acknowledged that a bill to that effect died this year in the state Legislature.

The Citrus Heights Republican told protesters that legislation is needed to prevent the dampening effect on religion caused by punitive damage awards and potential assessments on individual churchgoers.

"The fear could cause people to think twice before joining a church," he said.

Clergy from several faiths, other states and other countries joined the demonstration because, they said, their churches share the same concerns. Faiths represented included Baptist, Lutheran and Seventh-day Adventist.