

Dr. Alan Seay, Superintendent, Van Alstyne ISD
April 12, 2007

My name is Alan Seay and I am the Superintendent of Van Alstyne ISD. Van Alstyne is a small school district located between Sherman and McKinney on Hwy 75. My school district is in House District 62, represented by Larry Phillips.

I support this bill because it protects our school, the school board, and the school's administrators. This bill will allow our school to concentrate on the educational needs of our students without being forced into a position to be "word police".

When I was a high school principal, I can remember sitting on the stage at graduation waiting for our student speakers to give their speeches. While I personally required the students to submit a written draft of the speech for my review, I could only hope they would actually follow their written copy. Since the students speaking at our graduation ceremonies were our top academic students, I had to put a lot of faith in their sense of proper decorum when the speeches actually began. Thankfully, I never experienced an embarrassing incident and our students consistently performed magnificent and inspiring speeches that promoted our schools and teachers.

However, in 2003 I can remember our Valedictorian standing to deliver her farewell speech to her class. She related the importance of her Christian faith in her life as a high school student. She unashamedly shared her religious values with her audience, including her personal salvation experience that meant so much to her. I can remember physically wincing on the stage, not because of the words she shared – they were her story and a part of her personal experience at our school – but at the reality that someone in our audience would complain or file a legal suit because the school allowed the student to speak of her religious beliefs. While I could have stood up, crossed the platform and unplugged the public address system, I chose to allow the young lady to complete her speech. In fact, I joined the audience, the teachers, the parents, and her classmates in applauding her moving address. Thankfully, no one objected to her speech ... but I think in this society that may be the exception rather than the rule.

House Bill 3678 allows the school to adopt a policy ^{giving} ~~that would allow~~ certain students the opportunity to express their personal religious beliefs without having to worry about accusations of impropriety. Rather than forcing that on school districts through legislative mandate, this bill allows the individual school districts to develop this policy if it is consistent with the community's values. For those schools that adopt this policy, the bill would provide the school protection in matters where the student might express a religious belief in the course of some official school event.

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