

School Shuts Off Mic as Valedictorian Voices Faith

Joshua High School officials didn't just act like a school bully when they turned off a valedictorian's speech after the speaker mentioned Jesus. They also violated Texas law and the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

Fox News' Todd Starnes reported that when a Christian valedictorian at Joshua High School referenced his faith in his graduation speech, school officials literally turned the microphone off. The valedictorian has been accepted to the U.S. Naval Academy to become an officer, and Principal Mick Cochran threatened to write a letter to the Navy saying that the young man is of poor character in an attempt to persuade the Navy to refuse allowing the talented student to attend.

Now new facts have come to light, highlighting just how egregiously illegal this school conduct is—and it is just the latest in a nationwide trend of hostility toward observant Christians and other people of faith in this country.

The valedictorian's name is Remington Reimer. Like previous graduation speakers, Reimer had to submit advance copies of his personal speech for review by school officials, including Cochran. Breitbart News has obtained a copy of an earlier draft of Reimer's speech, which is covered in edits and changes required by the school.

Some things Reimer wanted to say were completely stricken from the speech by various school officials. Two such statements were a reference to his Christian faith and thanking God for sending Jesus Christ to secure forgiveness for sin.

Reimer decided to say something anyway, led by his faith to believe that it's important to thank God for the blessings and successes in life. When Reimer started to say this in his

speech, school workers turned off his microphone on the stage to silence him.

One type of restriction the First Amendment to the Constitution never permits is viewpoint discrimination. This is speech that does not forbid a subject but instead forbids certain viewpoints about the subject. The Supreme Court has repeatedly made clear that forbidding someone to say something because it expresses a Christian viewpoint on the subject (such as crediting faith in Jesus for enabling you to succeed in school) is viewpoint discrimination and is always unconstitutional.

Reimer is being represented by Hiram Sasser at Liberty Institute, a leading law firm for religious speech issues. As Sasser explained to Breitbart News, Texas law specifically says that when a school has a policy allowing valedictorians to speak during graduation, the school is creating a “limited public forum.”

Since the valedictorian’s address occurs in a limited public forum, it violates Texas law to require a speaker to only say whatever words the government approves. In fact, the statute was written precisely to protect these young private citizens from being subject to government speech controls.

The school claims it had to impose this restriction to keep others from thinking Reimer’s religious speech was on behalf of the school. But again, this Texas law—the Religious Viewpoints Anti-Discrimination Act—explicitly says such speech will not be attributed to the government and requires schools to publish a disclaimer in the graduation program to avoid confusion.

So, legally, Joshua High School and its employees are in serious trouble. Sasser is requesting a meeting with the school board by June 24 to discuss a public apology and a public promise never to do this with another student.

If the school refuses to comply with these requests, its flagrantly illegal and unconstitutional censorship of religious belief and protected speech could carry a stiff price.

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