

PRESS RELEASE

From the Office of State Senator Jeff Wentworth

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Pledges of allegiance to national and state flags added to minute-of-silence bill

Texas students constitutional right to reflect, meditate or pray in school took another step forward on March 27 when members of the Senate Committee on Education unanimously approved Senate Bill 83.

The approved bill differed from the one I filed in November. After listening to constituents and looking at other minute-of-silence bills, I changed Senate Bill 83 to require the recitation of the pledge of allegiance to the United States flag and the pledge of allegiance to the Texas flag as well.

Many Texans I talked with mistakenly believe that students recite the pledge of allegiance each day as they did when they attended school. This is no longer the case.

Students may recite the pledge, but it is not required. They also may have a minute to reflect or meditate, but cannot be told they may pray.

This may seem to be a minor point since the Education Code currently allows for a moment of silence but the exclusion of the word pray has been a burr under the saddle of millions of Texans since the United States Supreme Court ruled in 1962 that prayer in public schools was unconstitutional.

The vast majority of Texans -- regardless of political party affiliation -- have been unhappy with that ruling. It was encouraging when the U.S. Supreme Court last year upheld a state law in Virginia that mandates one minute of silence for reflection, meditation or prayer in Virginia public schools.

The bill I filed here in Texas states that the board of trustees of each school district, after the recitation of the pledges, shall provide for the observance of one minute of silence for students to reflect, pray, meditate or engage in any other silent activity that is not likely to interfere with or distract another student.

Aristotle said that habituation at an early age makes more than a little difference, it makes almost all the difference. If you agree with Aristotles philosophy, then if you want children to be responsible, hold them responsible. If you want children to know what work is, have them work.

If you want children to love country and state, teach them to honor their flags. If you want them to value a power higher than their own, provide them with a minute to reflect, meditate or pray.

Because pledging allegiance to a flag may be contrary to some religious beliefs, Senate Bill 83 contains an opt-out provision to excuse a student from reciting a pledge of allegiance upon written request from a students parent or guardian.

Pledging allegiance to our national and state flags and observing a minute of silence would reinforce Section 28.002 of the Texas Education Code. The section notes that one of the primary purposes of the public school curriculum is to prepare thoughtful, active citizens who understand the importance of patriotism and can function productively in a free enterprise society with appreciation for the basic democratic values of our state and national heritage.

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