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## Exeter Union High School commencement ceremony won't include prayer

BY VICTOR GARCIA • [VDGARCIA@VISALIA.GANNETT.COM](mailto:VDGARCIA@VISALIA.GANNETT.COM) • JUNE 2, 2010

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Exeter Union High School seniors will have a moment of silence instead of a prayer at Friday's graduation ceremony.

High school district trustees Tuesday voted 3-0, with Joe Conley and Charlie Norman absent, to eliminate the student-led prayer. Many at the special board meeting had spoken out in favor of the 50-year tradition, and some stood and prayed as trustees met in closed session.

Meanwhile, school-prayer opponents included two former students and two current ones with signs reading "God Hates Showoffs" and "God Says No Prayer."

After the trustees' decision was announced, legal counsel Michael Smith of Lozano-Smith said the U.S. Supreme Court has determined that public prayer is not constitutional in school settings. Several [organizations](#), including Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the Freedom From Religion Foundation and the Anti-Defamation League had demanded that Exeter Union High School District trustees eliminate student prayer from the graduation ceremony.

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Trustee Mark Pascoe said he's a person of faith but that his beliefs "aren't going to be changed one bit if we do a moment of silence."

Among those supporting the student-prayer tradition Tuesday was parent Vicke Riddle.

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"If the already scheduled student speaker chooses to pray, that's protected under the [First Amendment](#)," she said.

Kathleen Brooks, an Exeter Union High English teacher who said she was speaking as a parent, also supports prayer at the ceremony.

"I believe that as a government, as a country, we have to recognize the rights of the minority," she said. "But not necessarily by ignoring the rights of the majority."

Others said they wanted the conflict to end so students could enjoy a peaceful graduation.

Margie Reed, who works at the school and whose son is a senior, thanked the board for showing "the courage to do what you know has to be done."

"As Christians, we do need to fight this," she said, "but not on graduation night."

### Ballots Not Counted

Trustees voted earlier this year to cancel the prayer, then decided to let seniors vote on the matter. Seniors voted last week but the ballots were not counted and will be destroyed, Superintendent Renee Whitson said.

"I think they should have stuck with their original decision, rather than deciding that students should vote on it," said Pam Pescosolido, mother of a junior.

Whitson said after the meeting that the board "worked very hard and long considering the law."

"We do have a responsibility to be fair and we want to have equal respect for all," she said.

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*;) and they loved to pray out loud*

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*Now you want to murder  
people who pray at  
graduations? Enjoy your Kool  
Aid as you ride the short bus.*

*lol  
thought satan had a silver tongue?? your's is  
more... pewter...*

*name your church, devil...*

*when i said tent.. i meant revival style dude.. i  
didn't realize you LIVED in a tent.. is that why  
you're so spiteful, rude, and a bad christian??*

*You are an atheist. What makes you think that  
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*ASSumed premise makes you?*

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comments just keep getting more foolish.

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*stirring that koolaid with  
snakes and drinking it in your  
bus back to the ozarks??*

*guess you have no pity for  
the 600+ murdered people in  
guyana?? they were  
christians btw...*

*;)   
and they loved to pray out  
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Aid as you ride the short bus.*

*Your reading comprehension is beyond  
reproach, my man.*

*Even I can't attain such levels to ride with you  
in the short bus.*

*Keep studying. You may reach second grade level eventually.*

woot

last

troll in 3...2...

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