

Make Recitation of Pledge of Allegiance Mandatory as an Educational Tool

By Steven Kurlander

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A South Dakota state senator proposed a bill this week making it mandatory for school children in that state to recite the pledge of allegiance at the beginning of the school day.

Rep. Hal Wick, a Republican from Sioux Falls, said the proposal would apply to all students in public and private schools in the state. His proposal was in response to a decision the day after Veterans Day by the Sioux Falls School Board not to require high school students to recite the pledge.

“To think the school board would do something like that the day after Veterans Day ... it really disappointed me,” he said.

The original Pledge of Allegiance was written in August 1892 by Francis Bellamy, a Baptist minister and Christian Socialist and published to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the discovery of the Americas by Christopher Columbus.

Most of us over 50 remember starting school every day looking at a flag in our homeroom and saying the pledge. It was as standard as saying “here” when our name was called by the homeroom teacher.

It was a time when Americans didn’t give a second thought to displaying patriotism by saying: I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America....”

Making students stand up and say the pledge each morning is not a jingoistic act of American imperialism or a violation of a student’s rights, as some would argue. It’s simply a statement of patriotism.

Yet today, in our politically correct world, it’s almost a crime to require children to state the pledge — it often results in lawsuits and recrimination. Recently, a Florida teacher was suspended for making her middle school children do so.

There’s got to be a common-sense balance when teaching patriotism.

It’s still important for children to learn to respect and even love the liberty and freedoms afforded to American citizens. Reciting the pledge, learning the provisions of the Constitution and taking a basic civics course should be mandatory in public schools.

And because America is a nation of individual liberties, making kids say the pledge should be tempered to respect a student’s right to not say it because of religious mandates, a belief in not displaying allegiance to anyone or any entity, or simply because they don’t feel like it.

That’s called respecting individual freedom.

So if they choose not to do so, they should still have to stand and listen, showing respect to the students who do recite it.

There’s always a danger in making patriotism and pledges compulsory.

This week is the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg and President Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address.

For decades, history students were made to memorize Lincoln’s 270-plus-word message that commemorated the few days of battle that claimed almost as many American lives as the entire Vietnam war.

“The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here,” Lincoln said.

Because generations of history teachers taught those words, the world did remember in great detail what Lincoln said there.

The recitation of patriotic words and speeches captures the reverence of American patriotism.

But we must recognize the last few words of the pledge as the most important too — “with liberty and justice for all.”

That means that while making it mandatory for students to learn and say the pledge, our laws should not require a dissenting child from saying it with the others too.

Loyalty should not be something forced on an American. It should be studied from the start of one’s education and participation in our society, whether it be a kindergartener or an immigrant seeking citizenship.

"The Pledge of Allegiance" Should Be Said in Schools

By Sarah Baker, Duluth, Minnesota

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In a world centered on political correctness, tolerance is key. What most people don’t realize is that tolerance goes both ways. Interestingly enough, the very people who advocate for tolerance don’t seem to understand the concept themselves. This is especially true when debating whether or not the “Pledge of Allegiance” should be said in public schools. Many students who do not support the recitation of the Pledge in school argue that we need to be tolerant of other ideas and respect all beliefs. Hypocritically, they seem unwilling to support those of us who wish to say the Pledge. Because tolerance comes from both sides, students like myself should be able to have the opportunity to say the Pledge in class.

Most people have forgotten the reasons why U.S. citizens began reciting the Pledge in the first place. In times of political and economic troubles, it was (and still is) important to stand together as a nation. Saying the “Pledge of Allegiance” offers the perfect opportunity for unity. By showing respect for the flag, citizens are directly supporting our wonderful country and all that it stands for. Acknowledging the flag is also a form of showing respect for all the men and women who died defending it. From the Revolutionary War to the War in Iraq today, soldiers have protected our country and given us “liberty and justice for all”, as stated by the Pledge.

In addition, those who do not support the “Pledge of Allegiance” often have a conflict with the words, “under God.” It is understandable that those who do not identify themselves as Christians do not wish to say these words; they should not be forced to say them. When “under God” was added to the Pledge in 1954, it was to show resistance to the Communist Movement in America. In keeping with tradition and the support of capitalism, “under God” is a valid part of the Pledge.

Living in the United States is a privilege that all citizens should be grateful for. It’s often forgotten how lucky we are to call this wonderful and free country our home. It baffles me that the “Pledge of Allegiance” is even debated about. After all that America has given us, should it really be that difficult to take ten seconds out of our school day to pay our respects? Everyone, young and old, rich or poor, Christians and atheists, Republicans and Democrats, can stand together and support our country. Being able to recite the “Pledge of Allegiance” in class offers every student this opportunity. The Pledge is not just 31 meaningless words—it’s a symbol of who we are as Americans.