

STATE AND LOCAL

School prayer B-CS school officials respond to court decision

By TERI BALOG
Reporter

Local school systems have had mixed reactions to the Supreme Court's June 4 decision to ban meditation and prayer in public schools.

Travis Nelson, president of the Bryan Independent School District, said the Supreme Court does not have the authority over an individual's decision to pray or meditate.

"They are making decisions such as this, when they could be spending their time on more important issues," Nelson said. "I think they are being too literal in their decision."

Nelson said there was prayer in the school system many years ago when he attended school and he doesn't see the need to change.

In a 6-3 vote Tuesday, the Supreme Court outlawed daily mo-

ments of silence if students are told they may pray during that time.

The decision does not necessarily mean that every state law providing for such daily moments of silence is invalid. If the law doesn't mention "prayer" by public school students — and if state legislators did not intend the law to endorse school prayer — it is valid. Texas doesn't have such a law. Each state school district is allowed to decide for itself whether or not to provide a moment of silence.

Dr. Henry Bonorden, superintendent of the Hearne school system, said the Supreme Court made a neutral decision.

"It appears that the students may still use this time to pray or meditate as long as the word pray is not used," Bonorden said. Students should be informed of the purpose of the mo-

ment of silence so the students that wish to pray can use this opportunity, he said.

"There should be a decentralization of authority on this issue, it should be left up to the communities to decide," Bonorden said.

John Ragor, president of the Bryan school board, said there is nothing wrong with silent meditation or prayer in school.

However, if the Supreme Court decides there will be no prayer in schools, then that is the law, he said.

Perry Pope, director of instruction for Bryan, said the decision does not effect its schools.

"It is the school's policy to neither advance nor inhibit religion," he



said. The classrooms do not have a meditation or prayer time, because the law prohibits it, he said.

Since College Station and Hearne do not have the silent meditation or prayer policy, the Supreme Court decision does not affect them.

Peggy Crittenden, of the College Station School System, agrees with Pope.

"It is against the law to have a meditation or prayer in the schools," she said, "so it won't affect our system."

Local groups expect little effect

By DARYN DEZENGOTITA
Reporter

Tuesday's Supreme Court decision banning prayer in public schools will have little or no local effect, several representatives of area parent-teacher organizations say.

The current concern with recent changes in state education board policy affected by House Bill 72 has taken precedence over parent-teacher organization group discussions of school prayer, they say.

The organizations are not active during the summer, so no immediate action will be taken on the Supreme Court's decision.

Jaime Templeton, president of the Southwood Valley Elementary

Parent-Teacher Organization says: "More than likely the decision will just be disregarded. I really don't think it will affect us locally. People have been so concerned with the changes in state policy that the subject has never been brought up."

Two representatives of the Bryan City Council PTA have conflicting opinions on the matter but they agree the decision will have little local impact.

"I think prayer is needed," says Bryan City Council PTA President Janie Velasquez. "With all the crime today, prayer couldn't hurt our children. I think prayer should be reinforced daily."

Marta McMurray, legislative

chairman, says, "Under the circumstances, I think it's the best decision the Court could have made. They should pray at home and at church, not at school. This year, the big issue was House Bill 72. We talked about it so much that prayer never came up."

Brenda Watson, College Hills Elementary PTA president says, "The subject will probably be brought up. I think people want prayer, but the few who don't probably will rule."

"I think it's silly that they can't use the word prayer. I think students ought to be allowed to pray in school and to call it prayer. I don't know if it will affect us. If it does, I'm sure it will be put to a vote."

Neither Bryan nor College Station Independent School Districts have a ruling on moments of silence in the classroom, and there are no state mandates on the subject.

The Hearne and Navasota districts do have silent meditation policies.

"I'm sure we will have some discussion on it," says Debora Copora, Hearne PTA president. "But we've never really had it practiced."

"I'm around the elementary schools a lot; I used to teach and I've never seen it (silent meditation) happen. It may be part of the policy or something they wanted to do a long time ago, but I've never seen it brought up. It's not a general policy as far as I know."

White leaning toward law to buckle-up

Associated Press

AUSTIN — Gov. Mark White said Thursday he is leaning towards signing a bill that would require Texas motorists to wear their seat belts.

"I'm inclined in that direction, but I haven't finished reading the bill," White said.

White noted that wearing seat belts saves lives and reduces auto accident injuries, but said he wasn't fond of the tactics the federal government has employed on the issue.

States have been told that unless mandatory seat belt laws are put into effect, automakers will be required to install the much more expensive air bags.

"I am a firm believer," White said. "Seat belts can save your life. It's a question of whether the government should mandate it."

Houston man boasts of dealing for alleged Mexican drug gang

Associated Press

HOUSTON — A Houston man boasted that he is a dealer for an alleged Mexican drug gang and is an associate of Rafael Caro-Quintero, accused of the abduction-killing of a U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration agent, an undercover officer testified Wednesday.

DEA agent Michael Spasaro testified he negotiated a \$1 million drug deal with Carlos Ivan Orozco, 43, who claimed last week that he distributes cocaine in the United States for the "Quintero cartel."

During a hearing Wednesday before U.S. Magistrate Calvin Botley, Spasaro said Orozco agreed to buy nearly seven pounds of cocaine and was making plans to purchase an additional 66 pounds.

The alleged gang, which authorities believe is run by Caro's uncle, has been the subject of a two-year investigation by a Houston-based Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force.

The Quinteros are accused in court documents of operating a major Mexican drug network that smuggles cocaine, heroin and marijuana into the United States. They have not been charged with any drug violations.

Rafael Caro-Quintero has been charged by Mexican authorities in the February abduction and killing of

DEA agent Enrique Camarena Salazar and pilot Alfredo Zavala.

During the negotiations, Spasaro said, Orozco talked about the slaying.

"He said he was personal close friends with two of (Caro's) uncles," Spasaro. "We talked about their problems with the killing of the agent and all the heat they're feeling."

Investigators also learned that Orozco was involved in a \$200 million real estate deal for the Quinteros and lived in a house in the Houston area owned by the family, Spasaro said.

Orozco claimed he was a distributor for a drug gang in Miami that was responsible for the importation of one ton of cocaine seized by agents last month, the agent said. Orozco also said he needed to buy cocaine from the agent because he had lost 88 pounds of the drug during the seizure, Spasaro said.

Orozco, Edward Jimenez, 33, and Ahmed Essaied, 33, were accused in a federal complaint last Friday of conspiring to possess and distribute cocaine. All are being held without bond.

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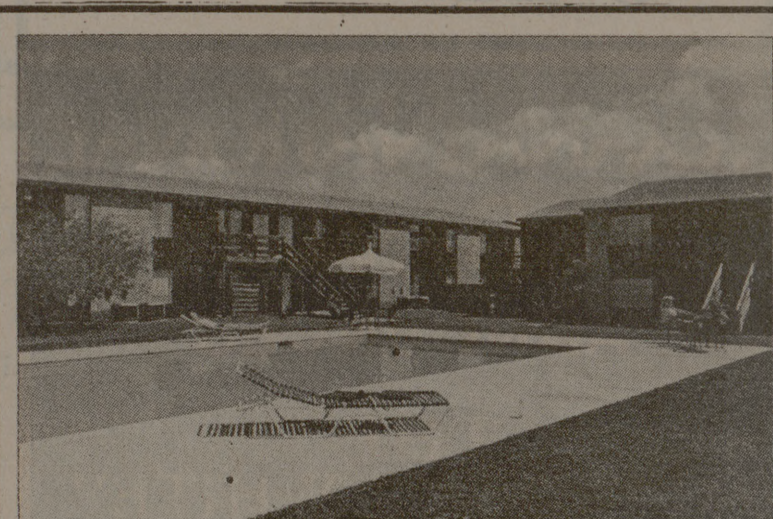
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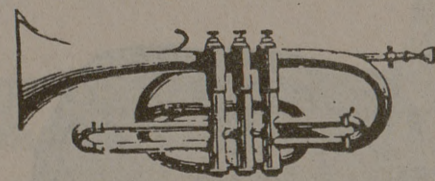


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