

Coaches, school ready to move forward after lawsuit

Two Elgin High School coaches were accused of leading team prayers, playing Christian music, and posting biblical verses

ELGIN (AP) — Residents in this town of nearly 5,000 say they are ready to get on with their lives after two high school coaches were accused of crossing the line between church and state separations.

The issue, heated by a lawsuit, was resolved Monday night when the Elgin School Board voted to extend the coaches' contracts and to settle the lawsuit.

Athletic director and football coach Eddie Baca's contract and baseball coach Brad Osborn's contract were up for review before the lawsuit was filed last month by the American Civil Liberties Union.

On votes of 4-3, Baca got a two-year extension on his contract; Osborn got a one-year extension.

Both were accused of bringing their religions into the locker room — leading team prayers, playing Christian music and posting biblical verses. They also were accused of try-

ing to coerce student athletes into attending church and other religious activities.

Baca admitting using Christian music and prayer, but said he never coerced any students to participate in religious activities or to attend his church.

"We're going to move on. I hope it's going to die now."

— EDDIE BACA
Elgin football coach

Osborn also denied those accusations. The ACLU filed its lawsuit against the district, the coaches and two other coaches on behalf of a group of students and parents. The school board voted 7-0 to approve a settlement that means the coaches will stop using Christian music, prayers and biblical verses.

It does not require the coaches to admit they did anything wrong, said Larry Wright, an attorney for Osborn.

The settlement in part says the coaches and school admit the lawsuit was warranted and necessary.

Kaye Stiles, a journalism teacher and parent who led the group suing the coaches, said that means the coaches admit they were wrong.

"I'm proud they agreed to settle this," said Mrs. Stiles. "But what kind of message does this send. It's hard to tell kids you can break the law and get rewarded."

Baca and Osborn said with the settlement done and their contracts renewed they were ready to move on and believe the community would heal from the rift caused by the lawsuit and their actions.

"We're going to move on," Baca said. "I hope it's going to die right now."

Elgin ISD Superintendent Ronald Bradford, said he was happy the lawsuit was settled and hoped to get back to the business of education.

Representative's constituent communication questioned

WASHINGTON (AP) — Texas Rep. Steve Stockman is pushing the envelope with a new House rule: Using taxpayer funds to communicate with constituents in ways beyond the traditional mass mailing or town hall meeting.

In the past, lawmakers were limited to using taxpayer-funded mailings — their so-called franking privilege — to reach out in their districts. Newsletters, questionnaires and postcards were the norm.

But when Republicans took over the House last year, they made a quiet change. Lawmakers were permitted to dip into their office accounts to buy radio time to advertise local constituent meetings.

So far, at least five House members have taken to the airwaves. Stockman, a freshman Republican from Friendswood, has gone the furthest.

He is using official funds to buy time for radio call-in shows

in his Gulf Coast district. He also is buying radio ads, running for weeks at a time, promoting his hour-long radio appearances.

While members have explicit approval to purchase ads promoting town hall meetings, the rules are silent on the use of official funds to buy time for a radio show.

"Bottom line: The committee rules do not prohibit members from using radio time for communication with constituents," said Bill Pierce, a spokesman for the House Oversight Committee that enacted the changes.

Nonetheless, Stockman's fall election opponent is crying foul. Democrat Nick Lampson calls the new rule a "Republican-created loophole" that politically benefits the incumbent, not constituents.

"I think this is an attempt to provide Steve Stockman with as much election-year publicity as he can get," Lampson spokesman Jonathan Brown said.

Elections

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Wang said the desire to be called the Republic of China also reflects the KMT's hope to reconcile with China and become one nation with both communistic and democratic government systems.

But, Su said, the descendants of the mainland Chinese are threatened by Taiwan's movement toward democracy because they are losing power in a nation they have called home for decades.

He said Taiwan and China, which disrupted the Taiwanese election by threatening its former territory with missile warfare, must work out their differences, and other countries must emphasize the need for peaceful negotiations.

"Just as Russia had to let go of the Ukraine ... China will have to let Taiwan go," Wang said. "The problem will not be resolved by other nations prodding them to stick their heads in the sand and ignore changes."

"And it won't be resolved if

both sides are holding onto deep-seated hatreds."

Gretchen Alther, a member of the Jordan Institute and junior international studies major, said the institute wanted to bring Wang to A&M because Taiwan's elections have been controversial and will continue to spark international debate.

She said Taiwanese students on the A&M campus are divided by the issue of Taiwan's independence, a situation of which many students are not aware.

Alther said she supports Taiwan's struggle for independence. She said the country should be responsible for its own fate and its own elections.

"I think the country has a right to choose its own government," she said. "I thought it was interesting that a lot of the U.S. thought of (the election) as a real democratic election but the KMT had a stronghold on it."

Wang, who came to the United States in 1977 from Taiwan, works at the Center for Taiwan International Relations to bring Taiwanese political leaders to meet with members of the U.S. executive branch.

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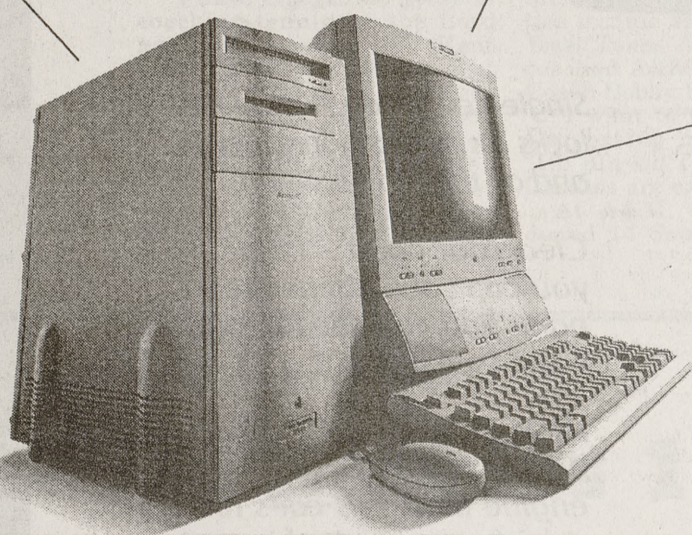
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