



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on June 6, 2011

Fed Appeals Court Overturns Prayer Ban at Medina Valley, TX Graduation

Fox News wrote of Biery's decision:

The ruling was in response to a lawsuit filed by Christa and Danny Schultz. Their son is among those scheduled to participate in Saturday's graduation ceremony. The judge declared that the Schultz family and their son would "suffer irreparable harm" if anyone prayed at the ceremony.



Words and phrases banned from the ceremony included "amen," "prayer," "join in prayer," "bow your heads," or "in [a deity's] name we pray." Judge Biery also ordered that the words "benediction" and "invocation" be struck from the graduation program, to be replaced with "opening remarks" and "closing remarks."

The school district immediately filed an appeal of Biery's decision, and Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott filed a brief in support of the appeal. Abbott declared that the ruling was unconstitutional, adding,

[It's an] attempt by atheists and agnostics to use courts to eliminate from the public landscape any and all references to God whatsoever. This is the challenge we are dealing with here. It's an ongoing attempt to purge God from the public setting while at the same time demanding from the courts an increased yielding to all things atheist and agnostic.

On Friday the federal appeals court reversed the ban, in time for Saturday's commencement ceremonies. *The Blaze* reports:

The 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals granted an emergency appeal filed by the Medina Valley Independent School District. Its San Antonio-area high school was ordered by a federal judge earlier this week to forbid students from asking audience members to join in prayer or bow their heads during Saturday's graduation.

Unsurprisingly, the appeals court's decision angered the Schultzes, who were assisted by the Washington-based Americans United for Separation of Church and State. Ayesha Khan, attorney for the group, asserted that the organization was "deeply" disappointed by the ruling and would continue with the lawsuit to prevent the promotion of religion in high school graduation ceremonies. She argued,

Students should be able to attend their graduation ceremonies without being pressured to participate in worship. All children should feel welcome at this important event in their lives regardless of their opinions about religion.

Because students were allowed to pray at Saturday's graduation, the Schultz family opted not to force



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their son to participate in the ceremony.

The overturning of the prayer ban was hailed by Texas Governor Rick Perry, as well as Attorney General Abbott and a number of conservative groups. Abbott declared, "It should not be illegal for students to say a prayer at a graduation ceremony. Now, the federal court of appeals agrees."

Valedictorian Angela Hildenbrand — who, with the help of the Liberty Institute, had filed an intervention lawsuit against the prayer ban, asserting that she was being deprived of her right to pray for her classmates and community during her speech — was delighted by the ruling of the appeals court. When told of the decision, she paused for a moment, then explained, "Took the time to thank God." She added, "We're just so, so thrilled with the court's ruling. We could just not be more pleased with how it turned out."



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