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# Just the Facts

**Monday, February 25, 2018**

*Hoopeston's only locally-owned daily news publication!*

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## District residents speak out against teachers not standing for Pledge



Hoopeston Area officials and citizens listen as Stephanie Pratt, standing behind white bookcase, asks people to use the energy from their feelings about standing for the Pledge of Allegiance into doing something positive for the community at Thursday's HA board meeting.

A letter to the editor written earlier this month concerning Hoopeston Area teachers who choose not to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance drew more than 80 people to Thursday's Hoopeston Area School Board meeting.

Kevin Moore's letter, which appeared in the February 13 issue of Just the Facts, outlined how his sons told him over Christmas break about a teacher who did not stand for the morning recitation of the Pledge.

Concerned, Moore wrote that he discussed the matter with the school board in January in closed session, and came away believing the board would not take a stand.

That prompted him to write his letter, in which he listed the board's policy calling for citizenship values to be taught in all schools, including, among others, patriotism

and the Pledge of Allegiance. "This board has affirmed through the adoption of this policy that these are the values of this community and should be taught to our students. Not standing, showing respect for the flag and reciting the pledge is a direct contradiction to the citizenship values outlined," he wrote.

He added that he would attend the February 21 meeting in hopes the board would discuss the issue, with board members stating their opinion. He encouraged others to attend the meeting, too.

Board President Mark Schaumburg said speakers would have five minutes to state their views and that the board would not engage with commenters or answer questions. If an audience member was "abusive or out of order," he

said, the board "will not hesitate to take action to have that person removed."

Two on-duty Hoopeston Police officers were among the audience members and left the meeting after the public comment portion ended.

Moore was the first to address the board, reiterating concerns listed in his letter, saying failure to stand for the Pledge shows disrespect for "our country, our flag and most importantly, our veterans."

He accused teachers of using their positions "to promote their political platform" and said political rhetoric from the left or right should not be tolerated from teachers or staff.

As for considering the matter a First Amendment issue, Moore wondered if teachers were allowed to say the Lord's Prayer before class. He cited a 2006 Supreme Court case, *Garcetti v. Ceballos*, in which the court ruled speech by public officials

is only protected if done as a private citizen and not while conducting their public duty. "I think this is a public building," he said.

Further, he said, he heard the superintendent sent out a letter to all staff - and possibly board members - telling them not to comment publicly on the issue. He then questioned whether the email was a violation of staff First Amendment rights. "You can't use the First Amendment argument on some things unless you want to use it for everything, just like you can't choose to enforce some board policies but not all of them."

"Teachers who cannot support the values of this community should seek employment elsewhere. This is our

**See PLEDGE on other side**



Pledge continued from other side

community, our values, our school.”

Concluding, Moore said the board owed it to the audience to tell them what they planned to do about the issue.

A handful of veterans addressed the board, including Rachel Fenner, 2009 graduate of Hoopeston Area High School and combat veteran, talked of Cpl. Josh Hargis, wounded in 2013 in Afghanistan. In a hospital bed, Hargis struggled to move his right arm into saluting position as he was awarded the Purple Heart. Using all his strength, Hargis honored a symbol, she said. Not standing for the Pledge “is not a small issue. We can’t lose this or we lose it all,” she added, pointing to the flag.

Vietnam vet Russell Burge said the last several years have shown a “decline in patriotism and morals.” He said the Pledge is not to a political party or president and sug-

Lunch Menus

Hoopeston Area grade schools

MONDAY: Mini corndog, baked beans, cucumber slices, applesauce milk

TUESDAY: Pepperoni pizza, baby carrots, salad, peaches, milk

WEDNESDAY: Chicken & noodles, mashed potatoes, bread & butter, celery sticks, pears, milk

THURSDAY: Taco, chips & salsa, baby carrots, salad, milk

FRIDAY: Hamburger/bun, baked beans, Wango Mango Juice, mixed fruit, milk

Hoopeston Area Middle School

MONDAY: Chicken nuggets, green beans, salad bar, applesauce, milk

TUESDAY: Pancake & sausage, hash browns, salad bar, mandarin orange, milk

WEDNESDAY: Tacos, refried beans, chips & salsa, salad bar, pears, milk

THURSDAY: Turkey roast, mashed potatoes, green beans, pineapple, milk

FRIDAY: Pizza, salad bar, mixed fruit, milk

Hoopeston Area High School

MONDAY: Chicken nuggets or ham & cheese, green beans, salad bar, applesauce, milk juice

TUESDAY: Pancake & sausage or Hot Pocket, has browns, mandarin orange, milk, juice

WEDNESDAY: Tacos or BBQ/bun, refried beans, chips & salsa, salad bar, pears, milk, juice

THURSDAY: Turkey roast or BBQ rib, mashed potatoes, green beans, pineapple, milk, juice

FRIDAY: Pizza or fish sandwich, salad bar, mixed fruit, milk, juice

gested those who do not wish to stand should “go somewhere else where you can do what you want to.”

“It’s a shame we have to be here,” said Emery Zimmerman, who talked about his son, Cortney, a sailor whose work with cancer-causing substances resulted in brain cancer from which he died in 2013 at age 39. His other son, Brock, did two tours in Iraq and Afghanistan in the Army and now works at the Pentagon.

“You got people hiding behind the First Amendment, he said. “Who gave us all these rights? Not the president, not the congress, not the superintendent of this school.”

Stephanie Pratt, high school special education teacher, said each side has an opinion that cannot be proven. Saying she had never seen so many people at a board meeting, she suggested that Instead of putting more energy into the issue, people channel that passion into improving the community. Just because a teacher acts in a different way does not mean that person is not an asset to the district, she said, urging people to “open their minds and hearts” towards those with differing opinions.

Dylan Swank, high school English teacher, read a letter from his father, Harry, a Vietnam era veteran, who called any test of patriotism or citizenship “wholly offensive and decidedly unAmerican.”

Swank also addressed the matter during his report as Hoopeston Education Association president.

The issue of standing for the Pledge caused “a little bit of disagreement here,” Swank said, saying that the ability to disagree isn’t a bad thing” and that “diversity of opinion is foundational to our democracy.”

Swank disagreed that standing for the Pledge can be a condition of employment for teachers. “Teaching conditions are in the collective bargaining agreement, signed by both the HEA and board of education,” he said. They are not found in the board manual.”

Swank’s soliloquy did not sit well with some audience

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members, who complained after the meeting that he did not adhere to the time limitation for speakers. Others wondered if all HEA members agreed with him, as he was speaking as the union president.

Board member Chris Small, who served 15 years in the Army with distinction and released with a medical discharge, speaking as a citizen, said people should always stand for the Pledge but have the right not to. “You have the right to do that, but not standing for the Pledge is disrespectful.”

Board members did not address the subject but a printed statement was available. It said, “The school district understands and protects the freedom of expression rights of all employees as individuals. While it is school district policy not to comment on employment matters, the schools always protect employee rights within the confines of ensuring compliance with school district rules and policies for the safety and education of the students in our charge.”

Weather

Cloudy today, tonight. High 28, low 16. Tomorrow, mostly cloudy. High 35, low 25.

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Obituaries

**MATTHEWS** - William Francis “Bill” Matthews, 82, of Rossville, died at 3:27 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 21, 2019 at Carle Foundation Hospital, Urbana. Visitation will be 10 a.m. until the 1 p.m. funeral service Monday at Rossville United Methodist Church. Burial will follow in Mann’s Chapel Cemetery, rural Rossville. Memorials are suggested to American Cancer Society, 2509 S. Neil St., Suite 1, Champaign IL 61820 or Rossville Historical Society 108 W. Attica St., Rossville IL 60963. Anderson Funeral Home, Hoopeston, is handling arrangements.

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