

Senate should follow House's lead, undo moment of silence

By **TOM MARTIN**

Editorial

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The Illinois House this week voted to undo what somehow seemed like such a good idea last fall: require students in Illinois public schools to observe a daily moment of silence.

We hope the Illinois Senate follows suit and repeals last fall's mandate.

Last fall, legislators stampeded to pass the law requiring teachers to have a quiet moment each day in class. It was actually an amendment to an existing bill that already allowed a moment of silence, but left the decision up to the teacher.

Not well disguised, it was an attempt to force prayer in public schools. The bill was even called "Silent Reflection and Student Prayer Act." The governor vetoed the bill, but the House and Senate found the two-thirds majorities to override that veto. In October 2007 the bill became law.

Within days a parent filed a federal lawsuit against the state and Buffalo Grove High School claiming the law is unconstitutional. That case is ongoing.

It's bad enough that the legislation was meaningless, outside of providing a political weapon to those who favored it, but adhering to the law also subjects already over-burdened schools with the threat of lawsuit.

This week a House passed a bill 72-31 that removes the moment of silence mandate and returns the option to teachers. The bill also changed the title of the law and removes the word "prayer."

Returning the decision on whether to have a quiet time to teachers is the right thing to do, although repealing the act would be even better.

The legislation last fall was a waste of legislators' time that became a waste of students' time. We're not against students praying in school. We're against the state monkeying with the limited class time teachers have. And, we're also against bad public policy. — Tom Martin, editor

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