

The Register-Guard: *Editorials*Letters: Commentary

LETTERS IN THE EDITOR'S MAILBAG

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This is a sampling of letters received in response to Brianna Rux's Jan. 11 guest viewpoint about the rejection of a proposed senior class motto at McKenzie High School because the motto had religious connotations.

Eagles will still believe and soar

I read Brianna Rux's Jan. 11 guest viewpoint and felt a great disappointment for the senior class of McKenzie High School.

How can a simple sentence of 10 everyday words be considered "too religious"? It appears to be a case of the powers that be exercising that power without regard for the students' wishes at all. Fear and the ever-present political correctness got in the way of common sense. Too bad!

May I say to the senior class, they may have robbed you of the motto you wanted, and it cannot be printed in your yearbook or on a banner to hang on a wall at your school. However, you are Eagles and you can — and I'm sure you will — believe, mount, soar, fly, and lift far beyond what has happened to you this graduation year. The best of luck to you all, and may God bless.

Patricia Davis

Eugene

Officials right to prohibit motto

Brianna Rux's contortions to justify use of the verse from Isaiah as a class motto remain unconvincing (Register-Guard, Jan. 11).

The verse is clearly religious in form and provenance, and in the intention of the students who chose it. The school administration, very properly, has seemingly disallowed quotations from the Bible, and presumably, from any books of religion.

Aside from that, the "eagle" motif is pretty hackneyed anyway. If you want a secular source for such imagery, I suggest a quote from the Steve Miller Band's "Fly Like an Eagle" or, my own graduating class's theme song, "Freebird" by Lynyrd Skynyrd. It's better poetry, too.

Rux unfortunately displays ignorance of the constitutional principles she should

have learned at McKenzie, surmising that the school administration disallowed the motto because it “could cause a lawsuit.” A less cynical person might say the principal et al. wanted to follow the injunctions of the law because it is the right thing to do.

Rux finishes her column by complaining that her class will have to settle for a less-meaningful motto. I would suggest that if, after four years of high school, the only aphorism the seniors of McKenzie High School can come up with is a strategically edited verse from Isaiah, lack of awareness of the Constitution may be the least of the educational malpractice perpetrated on them by their school.

Joe Renaud

Eugene

Bible quotes on public buildings

The Jan. 11 guest viewpoint by Brianna Rux stated well the dilemma the senior class finds itself in.

Even though the students ultimately have to abide by policy set by the administration, it seems that reason and common sense have been set aside in favor of the “separation of church and state” rule. No matter that numerous buildings in Washington, D.C., have religious or scriptural references on them or in them (The Capitol building: Psalm 16:1; Washington Monument: “Laus Deo (Praise be to God)”) or even that our own University of Oregon’s Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art is engraved with a quote from the book of Proverbs — this senior class may not step out of line with any reference to scripture, even a sanitized version.

They apparently are being taught the rules of our adult society — offend no one or be ready for a lawsuit. We salute the spirit of the senior class of McKenzie High School and hope their pursuit of the truth is not compromised as they take their place with us.

Roger Cumming

Susan Cumming

Springfield

Motto is inspiring, not religious

One of my favorite cartoons from the New Yorker years ago shows a woman at a cocktail party addressing two men: “I read somewhere that people are stupid.”

In the intervening years I have gathered much evidence to affirm that sentiment.

The recent article about McKenzie School District officials' rejection of the students' preferred motto ("They that believe shall mount up with wings as eagles") suggests there is something wrong with the water upriver.

Assuming that the McKenzie High Eagles attempted to find a motto using language that had never been used before and could not be construed as a reference to anything that might offend anyone, what they did settle on is a beautiful and inspiring statement that only frightened and narrow minds could reject as overly religious. I work daily with individuals for whom the quality of their lives (and sometimes their survival) depends upon finding something in which to believe that encourages them to make the most of each day and of themselves.

I believe in the power of education and ideas. I believe that we can soar like eagles when we allow our beliefs to become truer than our fears. I believe that most compassionate and intelligent people would not dismiss or discount these beliefs as doctrinal or religious.

If the majority of McKenzie High students believe in their motto, I hope they are willing to shut down their school as a true act of learning until ignorance surrenders.

Scott Lubbock

Eugene

Don't let turkeys beat the eagles

To Brianna Rux and all of the students of McKenzie High School: Belief in yourselves and each other is a wonderful thing. I don't remember the origin of this but it is certainly appropriate now: "When soaring with the eagles, don't let the turkeys bring you down."

Fred McCord

Eugene

Motto ban is free speech issue

I am a passionate believer in the doctrine of the separation of church and state. During the 25 years I taught in the Eugene public schools, I advocated tirelessly for the rights of children to have freedom of religion and freedom from religion in state-sponsored educational settings.

But I am also a firm advocate for another First Amendment right: freedom of speech. The decision to disqualify the McKenzie High School student body's choice of class motto on the grounds that it comes from the Bible is wrong. The

Bible is part of our landscape; it is a valuable book as literature and also as a source of wisdom.

It is not the only valuable book, nor is its wisdom the only wisdom, but the quote in question, "They that believe shall mount up with wings as eagles," is beautiful, fitting and inspirational. Are we trying to teach tolerance by disallowing this message or are we, in fact, promoting a different kind of closed-mindedness?

Mary Bauer

Eugene

Students wiser than officials

Congratulations to the McKenzie High School seniors. They are so much wiser than their school principal and superintendent that there is no comparison.

If school officials won't allow the seniors to use any words that are in the Bible, then they have really cut down the size of the students' vocabulary. The seniors weren't quoting the Bible. They were just using a phrase similar to one in the Bible that relates to their school mascot.

And to think, these school administrators supposedly have a college education. Just remember, seniors, when you get out into the world after school, keep thinking clearly and wisely. You have minds of your own. Don't let them brainwash you into their way of thinking.

Ray E. Landau

Springfield

Alteration changes passage

I write regarding Brianna Rux's Jan. 11 guest viewpoint, "Class feels betrayed over motto." As translated by the New Revised Standard Version, Isaiah 40:31 reads, "but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles." The "believe," substituted for "wait for the Lord," surely renders the McKenzie High School senior class motto significantly different from the biblical text.

Andrew Tan

Eugene

School should reconsider ban

The students from McKenzie High School found something in a book from history

— the Bible — and modified it to comply with state and federal laws.

The new and improved motto, “Nothing we do changes the past, everything we do changes the future,” is a phrase coined by Joan Chittister, a Benedictine nun for more than half a century, whose “outspoken views often “clashed with the American political scene.” You will find on her Web page the title “one of the most renowned spiritual leaders of our time.”

I am sure we would find many of the mottoes used by schools in this country have come from sources that could be considered controversial. It is my hope that the administration of McKenzie High School will reconsider its decision and permit the students to use the motto they thoughtfully chose for their school, or find a motto for the students that is truly unoffensive to everyone.

Kathleen Wheeler

Eugene

Related Links

- [Class feels betrayed over motto](http://www.registerguard.com/csp/cms/sites/dt.cms.support.viewStory.cls?cid=47560&sid=5&fid=)
- [Student protests district's rejection of motto](http://www.registerguard.com/csp/cms/sites/dt.cms.support.viewStory.cls?cid=48133&sid=4&fid=)

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