



U.S. Congressman

**Nick Rahall***WORKING FOR WEST VIRGINIANS*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JUNE 26, 1992

CONTACT: STEVE SPINA

PHONE: (202) 225-3452

**RAHALL CONDEMNS SCHOOL PRAYER RULING**

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall (D-WV) today expressed deep disappointment at the Supreme Court ruling on the Weisman case against school prayer. The Court ruled, in a 5-4 decision that prayer at high school graduations was unconstitutional.

"It is like de je vu," said Rahall citing the Madelyn Murray O'Hair decision 30 years ago which banned prayer in school. "I cannot tell you how often my constituents, no matter what they may have originally contacted me about, will mention their belief that the loss of the right to offer prayer or Bible reading in schools has contributed to excessive violence in schools and on campuses, to drug abuse by students at younger and younger ages, to school vandalism and to the number of high school dropouts."

The Supreme Court case stemmed from a junior high school graduation ceremony in 1989 in Providence, R.I., where it had been policy to invite clergy members to come and give invocations and benedictions. The father of one of the students, Daniel Weisman, asked that no prayers be given. The school, however, invited Rabbi Gutterman to offer a prayer.

Mr. Weisman then filed a temporary restraining order in effort to block the Rabbi's prayer. A lower court ruled that there was not enough time before the ceremony to make a decision. The Weisman family attended the graduation ceremony. A month later, Weisman filed an amended complaint which sought to bar school officials from inviting clergy to deliver prayers.

"When the Weisman family sued to stop prayers at high school graduations and the case reached the Supreme Court, I had hoped the Court would use this opportunity to overturn its earlier decision in the Madelyn O'Hair case and allow appropriate prayer in school, even if only a moment of silence. This decision in the Weisman case simply locks in the anti-school prayer decision of 30 years ago," said Rahall.

"I would not be offended if a Rabbi uttered a short prayer that mentioned God at school graduation and I doubt any student would feel they were being forced to participate in a full-blown religious ceremony under such circumstances," added Rahall.

--30--