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Statement from the American Civil Liberties Union of Iowa regarding bill mandating recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance by all students in Iowa.

by R. Ben Stone, ACLU-IA Executive Director
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On February 12, 2003, a bill (House File 172) was introduced in the Iowa legislature mandating that all students in all schools in the state of Iowa recite the Pledge of Allegiance at the beginning of each school day. [Text of bill follows at end.]

The following is a statement released by Ben Stone, Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Iowa:

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"Considering the significant opposition that exists among Iowans to the war in Iraq, the timing of this bill is unfortunate. Even if well-intentioned, it is inescapable that this bill, if enacted, would have the effect of compelling conformity among people who disagree profoundly regarding the war. Our children, in particular, deserve to be insulated from such coercion, and our teachers should not be placed in the position of enforcing government mandates regarding the expression of ideas.

"If this nation invades Iraq, Iowa's children should not become fodder in the conflict over the morality of that invasion. They should be allowed to learn -- and think -- about the profound implications of war without the government mandating the outcome of the debate.

"It is wrong to think that proposals such as this serve our country well. This is because America is not about government mandating uniformity; it is about embracing freedom of thought, and the right to disagree, in a democracy. And it is respect for that essential principle that unites America, not some political decree."

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Text of HF 172 follows:

HF 172 - An Act requiring that public schools and nonpublic schools cause the pledge of allegiance to be recited at the beginning of each school day.

Section 1. Section 280.5, Code 2003, is amended to read as follows:

280.5 DISPLAY OF UNITED STATES FLAG AND IOWA STATE FLAG == RECITATION OF PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.

1. [Unchanged]

2. The board of directors of each public school and the authorities in charge of each nonpublic school shall cause the pledge of allegiance to be recited at the beginning of each school day unless the authorities in charge of a nonpublic school determine that this requirement conflicts with the school's religious doctrines.

Persons reciting the pledge of allegiance shall stand holding their right hand over their heart. A student shall not be compelled, against the student's objections or those of the student's parent or guardian, to recite the pledge of allegiance, but shall be required to maintain a respectful silence.