



505 Fifth Avenue, Ste. 901
Des Moines, IA 50309
(515) 243-3576

ACLU of Iowa Condemns Roosevelt Principal for Canceling Speech by Alveda King - 9/25/2007

by R. Ben Stone, Executive Director
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DES MOINES - The ACLU of Iowa on Tuesday criticized Roosevelt High School administrators for canceling a speech by a conservative relative of Martin Luther King, Jr.

"Principal Kathie Danielson does the students of Roosevelt High School a disservice when she decides she must protect them from viewpoints that are controversial," said Ben Stone, Executive Director of the ACLU of Iowa. "Alveda King was invited to speak, and telling her to stay away now is wrong, for it implies that the school is taking sides on the abortion issue, while at the same time depriving students of an opportunity to engage this important moral topic," he added.

This is not the first time administrators at Roosevelt High School have shown contempt for the First Amendment – and received criticism from the ACLU of Iowa for doing so. In May of 2005, two students were briefly told to discontinue wearing shirts which displayed an anti-abortion perspective. The censorship incident, which at the time Stone described as an "abuse of power," took place before Kathie Danielson came to RHS a few months ago.

The ACLU-IA said that the fact that this controversy is taking place at Roosevelt High School is particularly ironic because the school was the site of a famous 1960s lawsuit involving the right of students to wear black armbands in protest of the Vietnam War. That lawsuit, *Tinker v. Des Moines*, was also brought by the ACLU of Iowa (then known as the Iowa Civil Liberties Union).

The 1969 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Tinker*, which affirmed the right of students to wear the armbands, to this day is invoked to protect the right of students to express their views, so long as their speech does not "materially and substantially interfere with the learning environment."