

My name is Nick Amb. I am the elementary principal at North Border-Walhalla. I'm a spouse, an adult dad to three grown children, and have had the joy of sharing our lives with four foster children. I've been in education for 33 years. While I share my views today with the committee that are rooted in over 20 years teaching government, and 10 as an administrator...my views are my own as a private citizen and do not necessarily reflect the views of my district.

**I am opposed to HR 1456 the chaplain bill.**

I cannot believe these ideas are being thrown around in seriousness. It's a pretty simple concept. The separation of church and state is wise, and good governance. Most importantly, it is the law. Every representative and senator has taken an oath to uphold the United States Constitution.

These issues belong with families. While some families may appreciate this sentiment, what denomination or religion would the school select? Consider a family who attends a Baptist church, and the school selects an Episcopalian chaplain. Perhaps a Unitarian Universalist chaplain is available, but many families attend an Missouri Synod Lutheran church. Would this be a good fit? This is

not a criticism of the correctness of any of these views. It is simply to illustrate the reason for things like this to be a family choice.

What if that chaplain has the intention of not just being that caring adult who can be there for kids when they need, but to share their version of “the truth.” I can see many opportunities for proselytizing.

When the need arises, school officials often can and do call upon people of faith in their communities. When I served in Minnesota, we had the horrible experience of losing a young man, a senior.

Dylan had passed in his sleep, a sudden medical event.. We learned literally five minutes before student arrival. I was the one who had to go in and tell my seniors.

Our students and staff were shaken. We reached out and had a local pastor to come in and “just listen” and just be with whatever kids needed/wanted, in their moment of grief and loss. We aren’t tone deaf to this need that can arise. In my current district, we have an amazing community person who we have called upon. She has been here when we had the loss of a teacher to cancer, and when we have had other issues where kids just needed a supportive ear.

She is adored by kids and respected by families. We didn't need a state law or a money to pull this off.

The larger issue here is "why." If administrators who know the community already partner in a time of need, why do we need to expend state tax dollars and have a law to do it?

We do not need state paid chaplains, the Ten Commandments, mandatory patriotism, or portraits of Donald Trump on classroom walls. (I somewhat kid here, but wouldn't be completely shocked if this wasn't on someone's list for law ideas), mandatory psych assessments for counselors, money grabs for charter and private religious schools (which are explicitly outlined as a no-no in our state constitution.)

I am opposed to all of these "culture war initiatives" which seem to be thrown out for likes and cheers, and I would guess are good for campaign donations as well. But these are almost always at odds with the principles of a clear separation of church and state. I trust my families with these issues. These issues are not for the school. The family has many choices and options on their own to pursue a solid spiritual guidance path that works for them.

This bill is another culture war “red meat” bill, an idea seemingly lifted from other states.

**What we do need** is a solid funding package, and one that solidly addresses the real issue of sparsity and prior consolidation efforts that are now coming back to actually be financially detrimental to our local taxpayers and will make serving the kids who live in our district harder and harder, with fewer and fewer resources.

Our little elementary up here is consistently in the top echelon of both achievement and growth in ELA and math. It costs real money to run two plants in remote and rural ND. I would invite anyone to come and see for themselves the work of a high flying rural school.

I urge you on behalf of our staff and kids. Please focus your time and efforts on meaningful work that will improve the lives of our kids, families, and staff.

With regards,

Nick Amb

Walhalla