



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on June 18, 2014

## High School Student Defies Officials, Shares Faith in Speech

The salutatorian of a senior class in California threw caution to the wind at the high school's June 12 graduation ceremony, using his short speech to share his faith in God — in defiance of warnings by school officials that he not use “unconstitutional” religious language in his speech.

Brooks Hamby, a senior at Brawley Union High School in Brawley, California, was notified that he had been selected as the salutatorian for his graduating class and was asked to present a draft of his speech to school officials. But when Hamby, who is a star student and athlete at the school, submitted his first draft, it was rejected because of references to his Christian faith.



In fact, noted [Fox News](#) columnist Todd Starnes, school officials rejected the first two versions of Hamby's speech with the terse explanation that they “oppose government case law and are a violation of the Constitution. The district is advising you that reference to religious content is inappropriate and that the two drafts provided will not be allowed.”

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[Liberty Institute](#), the conservative legal advocacy group that is representing Hamby in a complaint against the school, noted that the young man's first speech draft, which was written as a prayer, included the petition: “Heavenly Father, in all times, let us always be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven us.” The second rejected version also included faith language, along with a mention of the school's censorship of Hamby's speech.

On the day of the graduation ceremony and with no approved speech, reported Liberty Institute, “Brooks and his parents were called to see the principal and were notified by the school district that if Brooks ‘interjects religious content, the sound will be cut off, and a disclaimer to the entire audience must be made explaining the district's position.’ After receiving this information, Brooks rewrote a third version of his speech, which he sent to the superintendent. He received that version back with all religious references crossed out in black.”

Hamby received no response from the principal to a fourth version of his speech, submitted just hours before the ceremony, and so rose to the occasion on the evening of his graduation, explaining to his fellow students: “In coming before you today, I presented three drafts of my speech, all of them denied on account of my desire to share with you my personal thoughts and inspiration to you, my Christian faith. In life you will be told ‘No.’ In life you will be told to do things that you have no desire to do. In life you will be asked to do things that violate your conscience and desire to do what is right.”

Hamby went on to advise his fellow students that “no man or woman has ever truly succeeded or been



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fulfilled on the account of living for others and not standing on what they knew in their heart was right or good.”

Turning to Scripture, the young man added, “I will leave you with this, a quote from the biggest, best-selling book of all time in history,” quoting from Matthew 5: “You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.”

Hamby encouraged his classmates: “Be the salt of the earth. Be strong and stand for your convictions and stand for what is right, what is ethical, what is moral and what is Godly, no matter what is the cost to you. Stand for what is good wherever you go and whatever you do.”

Concluding his speech with a bold declaration of his faith, Hamby said: “Congratulations class of 2014, and may the God of the Bible bless each and every one of you every day for the rest of your lives.”

The Stanford-bound 18-year-old told Todd Starnes that with such a public opportunity, “I didn’t want to compromise my faith. I wasn’t interested in removing every trace of God or Jesus. I wasn’t interested in conforming to [the demands of the school district]. I did not want to compromise my values. I didn’t want to water down the message.”

Hamby emphasized that he also had no desire to be rebellious or difficult with school officials, and he was concerned about being labeled a rabble-rouser. “I did not want to compromise my values, but I wanted to work with them as much as possible,” he told Starnes.

Ultimately, after consulting and praying with both his parents and his pastor, Hamby came up with the short expression of faith and encouragement he delivered to his classmates.

In the end, school officials made no attempt to silence Hamby, most likely because they realized they had no legal right to do so. Said Hiram Sasser of the Liberty Institute: “It is outrageous that a government school official would demand that a salutatorian submit his speech for government review for the purpose of censoring religious speech.... No government official may censor simple references to God that served as personal acknowledgment by Brooks of something greater than himself.”



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