

High court limits student speech

by UPI

WASHINGTON - The U.S. Supreme Court Monday upheld the right of school officials to limit student speech about drugs at school events.

At issue was a banner students unfurled outside a Juneau, Alaska, high school in 2002 as Olympic torch bearers passed by on their way to Salt Lake City that read "BONG HiTS 4 JESUS."

Principal Deborah Morse confiscated the banner, saying it violated a policy against speech promoting drug use.

Student Joseph Frederick sued, saying his right to free speech had been violated. The court ruled against Frederick, who said the message was nonsense, not pro-drug.

"School principals have a difficult job, and a vitally important one," Justice John Roberts wrote in a decision overturning a lower court. When Frederick suddenly and unexpectedly unfurled his banner, Morse had to decide to act -- or not act -- on the spot. It was reasonable for her to conclude the banner promoted illegal drug use -- a violation of established school policy -- and failing to act would send a powerful message to the students in her charge, including Frederick, about how serious the school was about the danger of illegal drug use," Roberts wrote.

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