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AMERICAN AFFAIRS

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PUBLIC SCHOOL VOLUNTARY RELIGIOUS CLUBS

Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, views with concern and alarm the recent 5-1 Supreme Court decision in Westside Community Schools v. Mergenthaugh. The Court upheld a law requiring public high schools to give religious clubs the same access to school facilities as other “noncurriculum-related” clubs and groups. Thus, the decision upholds the constitutionality of the Equal Access Act of 1984 which requires “one or more noncurriculum related student groups to meet on school premises during noninstructional time” to grant the same privilege to religious groups.

It is our belief that while the Court’s decision may not constitute a government endorsement of religion, banned by the First Amendment, that, as Justice John Paul Stevens argued, it “comes perilously close to an outright command to allow organized prayer (and perhaps other religious ceremonies) on school premises.”

Hadassah remains firmly committed to the Separation of Church and State. We are concerned that the decision will open the public schools to proselytizing by organized student religious clubs in violation of the principle of the separation of Church and State.