

STUDENTS OUTRAGED AT PATRIOTISM!

State Senator Michele Bachmann from Stillwater, Minnesota sent each student from the graduating class of Stillwater this letter of congratulations.

June 2004

Dear Graduate,

Congratulations on the celebration of your graduation! Along with your family and friends, I would like to extend my congratulations on this accomplishment.

The world is full of great opportunities as you enter this new chapter in your life. The hard work and discipline it takes to gain a high school diploma demonstrates your willingness and ability to face the responsibilities and challenges the future certainly holds.

The goals you set for your continued success as a citizen in our self-governed and free society are of critical importance. Our great nation was made, not simply by a self-governing democratic process, but by communities of responsible people who care. Freedom in America is defined, not by the desire and ability to do what we *want* to do, but by the ability and willingness of what we *ought* to do.

Your accomplishment in graduating from Stillwater High School is a great benefit to you and our society. Wherever life leads, be confident of continuing your ability to bring success to yourself and others. Set your goals high and be faithful to your high ideals. It is in serving that you will find greatness. You can make the difference.

Along with all of the educational opportunities, I hope you will remember your high school years with much fondness. These are certainly some of the best times of your life. Enjoy them.

Congratulations and warmest regards,

Michele Bachmann
State Senator, District 52

Of the 700 congratulatory letters sent by Senator Bachmann (above), 40 students returned them (unopened) with this letter. No names or signatures were included in the letter.

July 7, 2004

Ms. Bachmann,

As graduates of the class of 2004 from Stillwater Area High School we all received a letter of congratulations from you. While we appreciated the gesture, we feel we cannot accept your well wishes, as we believe that your policies on education are hurting rather than helping our public school system.

It can only be expected that in a changing nation our values will change as well. Minnesota is now one of the most ethnically diverse states in the country. Our citizens are divided in their political thought more than ever, and the face of the state is changing as new people and new times bring about a shift in the way we see faith, race relations, economic diversity and education. We as students feel that your ideas about education are too exclusive for the great diversity of thought found in this country and our schools today. Your belief that “students learn history that is consistent with and supportive of basic fundamental American principles as stated in the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution,” is simply too narrow of an outline for our social studies education. In fact we find your standards overall to have an unusual focus on conservative values and leaders and a general ignorance of the darker, less honorable periods of our history to be considered fair and balance. After all, we cannot celebrate our accomplishments and ignore our failures. When you state that it is essential that “our children be taught American values like sovereignty, patriotism and free market enterprise,” we would say that that is a close minded approach to education which we as students reject. America is about a diversity of people and opinion; it is about freedom to have healthy discussion about the positive *and* the negative aspects of our nation. To teach clearly conservative values disguised under the names of “patriotism” and “free market enterprise” to young people with moldable minds is simply slanted and unfair. Our education should not be influenced by the right wing “question nothing” fervor of the times. And when you say that “the parents have the right and responsibility of training their child in the way he should go,” we respond that we should have the right to be exposed to a wealth of ideas about America in order to form *our own* opinions.

In conclusion, we thank you for your interest in our education. We would hope that for the future classes to come through Stillwater public school system that you would give more thought to the fact that learning is about exploration. Give the students a chance to learn all they possibly can.

Thank you,
The class of 2004