

inter/national

From Associated Press Reports

Religion bill turned down

WASHINGTON — The House rejected a move Tuesday to allow student religious meetings during non-class hours in public high schools, after critics of the bill claimed that it would open the way for cults and devil worship in classrooms.

The 270-151 vote in favor of the bill fell 11 votes short of the two-thirds majority required for passage of the measure, which followed Senate rejection last March 20 of a proposed constitutional amendment that would have permitted organized, spoken prayer in public schools.

Pres. Reagan had fought for the school prayer amendment, which the Senate defeated 56-44, as a major election-year issue. He then embraced the concept of student use of public school classrooms for voluntary religious meetings if the school made classrooms available for other student extracurricular activities.

The defeated bill stated that any public secondary school receiving federal aid, which generally allows student-initiated groups to meet during non-class hours, could not discriminate against voluntary religious groups.

School employees would have had to be present as monitors, but not as participants, in such meetings, and no student could have been forced to attend.

At the end, debate over the bill was punctuated with horror stories of cults in the schools and equally fervent pleas for House members to ignore such "hogwash."

Supporters of the measure stressed the First Amendment

issue, saying the bill would intend to protect students seeking to exercise their constitutional rights of free speech and the free exercise of religion.

Opponents argued that the bill would establish religion in the schools and permit brainwashing of teen-agers.

The bill would have applied only to use of school premises during non-class hours.

Daughter testifies

EUGENE — Nine-year-old Christie Downs tearfully told a jury Tuesday that her mother shot her and her brother and sister along a rural road north of Springfield last year.

The girl, the state's key witness in the murder, attempted murder and assault trial of Elizabeth Diane Downs, told the prosecutor she still loves her mother despite what happened.

Christie, who suffered a speech impediment as a result of the shooting, broke down several times when asked to relate what she saw the night of the shooting.

Seven-year-old Cheryl Downs died of gunshot wounds suffered in the incident. Four-year-old Stephen Downs is paralyzed below the waist as a result of the attack.

Elizabeth Downs, 28, claims a shaggy-haired individual flagged down the car and fired the shots when she refused to give up her car. Ms. Downs also suffered an arm wound in the shooting.

The state contends Ms. Downs shot her three children because she felt they were an impediment to a reunion with her lover in Arizona.

Under questioning from Frederick Hugi, deputy district attorney for Lane County,

Christie said she remembered what happened the night of May 19 when the car stopped along Old Mohawk Road.

She said her mother "got out and pushed the (trunk) lever and went to the trunk."

"What did you see?" the prosecutor asked.

"She shot Cheryl," Christie Downs said.

"Did you see anyone in the road?" Hugi asked.

"No," Christie said.

The girl broke down crying after saying her mother then "leaned over the back seat."

The prosecutor asked her what happened next.

"She shot Danny," Christie said.

"Do you remember when you got shot?" the prosecutor asked.

"Yes," she said.

"Who shot you?" he asked.

"Mom," she said.

The prosecutor asked if Christie still loved her mom, and the girl replied, "yes."

Pair let go in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka — An American couple kidnapped five days ago by Tamil separatists who accused them of being CIA spies was released today at the Roman Catholic bishop's house in Jaffna, a church official said.

The U.S. State Department confirmed the release of Stanley and Mary Elizabeth of Columbus, Ohio.

"They are in good spirits, they are in good health and they're obviously overjoyed to be alive and free," departmental spokesman John Hughes said in Washington.

Rev. E. E. Selvarajah said the Allens had told their captors that they wished to be released at the bishop's house.

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