SENATE BILL NO. 2784

AN ACT TO AUTHORIZE AND DIRECT PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS IN PUBLIC ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS TO CONDUCT A DAILY ORAL RECITATION OF AN EXCERPT FROM THE "DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE"; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

SECTION 1. Principals and teachers in each public elementary and secondary school of each school district in this state shall conduct, before the opening exercises of each school day, an oral recitation of the following excerpt from the "Declaration of Independence":

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed....

In addition to the recitation required by this section, every school shall provide that, from time to time, an explanation of these words from the Declaration of Independence be given to students. The explanation shall include in a manner appropriate to the grade level of the students:

(a) A discussion of the nature of absolute monarchy, and the means by which this concept was challenged by the language of the Declaration;

(b) The origins of the idea of individual liberty and natural law and the impact upon American government of the ideas of the
eighteenth century Enlightenment;

(c) The role that the fundamental principles set forth in the Declaration played in the movement to abolish slavery in the United States;

(d) The role that the fundamental principles set forth in the Declaration played in the women's suffrage movement;

(e) The role that the fundamental principles set forth in the Declaration have played in our system of justice;

(f) The embodiment of these ideals in the Bill of Rights;

and

(g) That the terms "mankind" and "men" are used in an eighteenth century context, having been used from the fourteenth century to Jefferson's time to mean "human species" and "humans," and are not to be read literally as restricting the language of the Declaration to apply only to the male gender.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after July 1, 2000.