

NEWS

Burning Old Glory fires up flag flyers

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Go ahead, burn a flag.

That's what a recent controversial Supreme Court decision says to Suzan J. McChesney of 193 Chester St. That decision protects the burning of the American flag as a form of political protest.

Although she isn't burning with anger, the decision doesn't sit well with her and others interviewed yesterday who flew the flag outside their homes to help celebrate the Fourth of July.

"I think the Supreme Court was wrong because in a democracy some restrictions are needed to preserve the foundations of government. The flag is a symbol of the country. It should be treated with pride, respect and patriotism," Mrs. McChesney said.

Jean Brown of 251 Main St., Shrewsbury, said the decision might make flag burning more pervasive.

"It's putting ideas in people's heads ...," she said. "We don't go along with it at all and nobody we've talked to does either. I think it's awful."

Helen Tocarz of 383 Worcester St., West Boylston, had even stronger words.

"I was outraged," she said of the court's 5-4 vote. "I don't agree with it a bit."

Francis Sousa of 248 Main St., Boylston, also was a bit upset by the ruling.

"It's terrible. I don't think it's right. If they want to burn the flag, they should go out of the country and do it," he said.

The flag flies every day at 5 Summerhill Ave., where Earl and Elma Johnson have lived more than 30 years.

"It kind of gets your ire up to think people are burning flags," Mrs. Johnson said. "We've been taught we shouldn't do those things. I just don't think it's right," she said.

Flag burners probably are a frustrated, thoughtless lot, according to Mrs. Johnson.

"They do it because they're trying to show their anger. They're not thinking," she said.

In Northboro, people are thinking of trying to do something about the ruling. About 1,500 homeowners there decorated their lawns with small American flags, provided by Re/Max-First Choice Real Estate, 270 West Main St. Manager Mike Chiarelli and agent Dave Winmill came up with the idea in response to the outcry following the Supreme Court's decision.

The Supreme Court last month said that Texas authorities violated a protester's rights when they prosecuted him under a state law barring desecration or destruction of the flag.

The case centered around Gregory "Joey" Johnson of New York City, a member of the Revolutionary Communist Youth Brigade. He was convicted of flag burning during a 1984 rally at the Republican National Convention in Dallas and had been sentenced to a year in prison and fined \$2,000.

PHOTO; JOHN P. BRASSARD; Suzan J. McChesney and her son Eric.

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