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## Peter Rowe

### Let's hear it for an anthem we can sing



Tonight, just before the U.S. Navy Band's concert at the Del Mar Fair grandstand, Dr. Ed Siegel of Solana Beach will attempt to lead the crowd in a rousing chorus of "The Star-Spangled Banner."

On the glorious Fourth of July, what could be more appropriate? But Siegel's rendition of the national anthem is so controversial, you'd think he was crooning "The East Is Red" while stuffing Molotov cocktails with gas-soaked Old Glories.

"It's the identical 'Star-Spangled Banner,'" insisted Siegel, a psychiatrist and amateur pianist, "except all the little round circles are lowered a little bit."

Traditionally, our anthem is sung in the key of B-flat. The piece's 12-note range is a terrifying vocal challenge, but Siegel has found that most singers have a sporting chance in a lower key, G major.

For six years, he's led groups large and small in this song. Last year, he even conducted me through a surprisingly screech-free "Banner."

"I'm suggesting that this be the official key for public participation," he said. "What people experience when they can really sing the national anthem is, they get all stirred up with patriotism."

Fine. But don't expect the Pentagon or the Speaker of the House to approve.

## D.C. doublespeak

Siegel's resume is amazingly varied, ranging from "faculty member, UCSD Medical School" to "chair, Solana Beach public arts commission." Since launching his crusade, though, another title was attached to his name: "troublemaker."

"You are messing around with an institution," one congressional aide warned Siegel.

Last summer, Siegel's congressman attended a sing-along and heard this rendition. Randy "Duke" Cunningham loved it. "His performance of our anthem in the key of G major is much easier to sing than the traditional version..." he wrote to Speaker J. Dennis Hastert.

The same Sept. 7, 1999, letter proposed that Congress' next session open with Siegel's "Banner."

Three months later, Hastert responded with D.C. doublespeak.

Good news: "It sounds as if your constituent, Mr. Siegel, is both a talented musician and a great patriot!"

And bad: "Unfortunately, it is not customary to grant requests such as the one you submitted. I am certain that Mr. Siegel's rendition would be enjoyable. However, I am sorry that I must reject your request at this time."

## Sing this, Streisand!

Undeterred, Cunningham tried to champion Siegel's cause with the military.

"... he has attempted to have military bands perform his version only to be informed that they could not do so without authorization," the congressman wrote to the Pentagon. "I am asking your assistance in determining what regulations are in place that keep our national bands from performing the Anthem in the key of G major."

The assistant secretary of Defense's response: "... we are not aware of any regulatory restrictions on rekeying, nor does our office impose a policy in this area."

Siegel figured this meant the Navy Band's commander would be happy to conduct the G major "Banner" before tonight's concert.

He figured wrong.

"He said asking him to play it in G is like him telling Barbra Streisand what to sing," Siegel said.

The Navy Band could not be reached for comment last week. Siegel insists he'll lead fairgoers in the G major "Banner," unaccompanied. After six years, he has plenty of practice in carrying on this crusade, and carrying this tune, by himself.

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