

Statement before the Montana House Federal Relations, Energy, and  
Telecommunications Committee

John C. Board

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Members of the Federal Relations, Energy, and Telecommunications Committee:

I am here today to voice my support for the Senate Joint Resolution 19 ~~Resolution~~ to protect the Civil Rights of Montana citizens as well as citizens of the United States of America.

I am also here because of a vow I made to myself ~~50~~ years ago when I was a senior in high school. Having witnessed the tactics employed by Senator Joseph McCarthy and seeing the damage he did to numerous innocent Americans, I vowed then that, if ever our civil rights were threatened in a similar manner again, I would take a stand in their defense.

Forty-five years ago last August, when I came to Montana, I was 23-years-old, and I had to sign a Loyalty Oath before I could be employed. I was not hired to work in any secret service or to handle any security documents. Yet, in order to teach, I had to declare my loyalty. That requirement was later declared unconstitutional, but I still feel insulted that my loyalty to my country was even doubted.

Today, years later, we are contending with an onerous piece of legislation, the U. S. Patriot Act. It can do more damage to more Americans and their fundamental freedoms than anything in the history of our country.

- As a former public school teacher, I am concerned about provisions in the Patriot Act that allow agents of the federal government to seize library records from public libraries, public school libraries, and public and private college and university libraries.
- As a member of a Christian Church, I am disturbed that the Patriot Act provides for the FBI to monitor, without any evidence of wrongdoing, any religious group.
- As a person who participates in political activity, I am equally troubled that the Patriot Act also provides for the FBI to monitor any political group.
- The Patriot Act also authorizes the Attorney General to set up a system for up to two-million Americans secretly to provide information to the government about any persons whom they consider suspicious, and for the government to set up files on these persons. When I was a kid, it was this very tactic that was used to scare us about Communist Russia, China, and Cuba. How ironic it is that we now have a law that provides for neighbors to spy on neighbors in our own country!

If our libraries, our houses of worship, and our individual political activities are not protected from the very type of government that we say we abhor: that is, a totalitarian government, then we make a mockery of our icons of freedom: the Liberty Bell, the eagle, and the Bill of Rights.

In light of the foregoing, I am asking each of you to support the Senate Joint Resolution 19 to protect our civil rights. Some of you may think that no threat exists. When secrecy is empowered by law, we simply do not know if a threat exists or not, do we?

With what we do know, however, I am asking that you consider these questions, "Who will next be imprisoned with or without our knowledge? Will it be just another member of the Islamic

religion? Will it be a professor from a foreign, middle-eastern country who is denied a visa to teach in one of our colleges or universities? Will it be you after you have spoken out or acted against a policy supported by someone who thinks differently than you? Who will be next?"

The German Lutheran Pastor Martin Niemöller provided us with a clue to the answers to our questions when he wrote these haunting words:

First they came for the Jews  
and I did not speak out  
because I was not a Jew.  
Then they came for the Communists  
and I did not speak out  
because I was not a Communist.  
Then they came for the trade unionists  
and I did not speak out  
because I was not a trade unionist.  
Then they came for me  
and there was no one left  
to speak out for me.

Thank you.