

elvie miller

From: "elvie miller" <elviemiller@frontiernet.net>
To: <crismore@libby.org>
Sent: Monday, February 14, 2005 12:23 AM
Subject: Amish respond to SB 291

SENATE EDUCATIONEXHIBIT NO. 31DATE 2-14-05BILL NO. SB-291

Representing the Amish community at 5215 Farm to Market Rd., Libby, MT 59923

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Senator Bob Keenan,

To our respected and honorable Montana State Senators, we extend grateful and heartfelt support in consideration of the continuous and ongoing religious liberty and freedom we have enjoyed in our schools from our entrance into the state of Montana thirty years ago to this day.

As is well documented, the interference of certain state requirements, as in the case of Yoder vs. Wisconsin, 1971, revealed intent to undermine by force the free education programs adopted by home and church schooled Amish communities.

To our elected officials whom we seek to honor, we feel the imperative need to state our position with clarity and simplicity.

As spiritual leaders in our Amish community in Libby, Montana, we adjure you who are in authority to legislate our laws, we do not wish to undermine the public school system.

I (Lloyd Miller) migrated with my family to Montana in 1975, and as a teenager then, helped to pioneer an Amish community here. It was an immediate concern to the local superintendant of schools to establish whether or not we could be trusted to run our own private schools, as the gracious State of Indiana had granted to us and still grants today. The Montana Dept. of Education tested our small rural school near Rexford, Montana, and as I recall, all the outlying schools near Eureka and Rexford, Montana in 1975, with the Iowa Basic Skill Tests.

The score that came out of our school far exceeded the minimum requirements. On the measurement used for national scoring on the Iowa Skill Tests, our school of seven came out best of schools tested with us and two of our students had the top test grades. In 1979 when the school participated in the rural schools of north Lincoln County spelling bee, our third graders got first and third place. Many of the other Amish students were near the top as well. Needless to say, after the 1975 Iowa Skill Tests, the State passed laws which have been very home and private school freindly since that time, thanks largely to our good freind Bob Brown to whom we owe much to in this area. His labors have not been forgotten.

In our Libby Amish community we have at present 35 children 12 and under, and offer a combination of home schooling, and church supported teachers who take our children through a minimum of 8 grades. We believe it is of great importance for children to work with their parents and to "learn by doing", in numerous basic skills that will prepare them for life in an effective, emotionally stable environment that will produce a strong work ethic and honest citizens who both pay their taxes, including school taxes, and who go to the polls.

We have read SB 291 and we understand clearly the effect this would have in unnecessarily controlling our families, and impede the greatest gift we can give to the our great state: young people who do not draw unemployment or welfare, (we take care of our own, and cannot even fathom the meaning of "unemployment"), who will take care of their parents when they grow old,

who will never seek aid from our government, who pay their own schooling out of their own pocket, yet still pay school taxes (we have done this without complaining for generations), who give back to society a gift that education alone cannot meet, who give the gift of loyal support and honor to our government, who endeavor to be law abiding, who will build strong families and business ventures of their own. They will build family businesses that will contribute to the surrounding communities, through labors of their hands, in financial aid to the poor, in productivity and fine craftsmanship. Much could be elaborated on the reputation we have as producers of the finest furniture, baked goods, construction, produce, etc., etc. We do not say this to boast, we are simply wanting to state where we stand.

It would be a direct violation of our religious beliefs and freedom of religion to accept these needless requirements that we notice have attached to them threats of fines and imprisonment (read the fine print). We would like to make you aware that this is not the first time this has been attempted. We encourage you to read the enclosed documents, as afore mentioned, Yoder vs. Wisconsin. In them you will also find that our forefathers suffered severly through torture and death at the hands of controlling state lawmakers in Europe 4 centuries ago. (this is not something new to us) You may not be aware that our forefathers were among (if not the very first) people who used the terms "seperation of church and state" and "freedom of religion". They had no recourse but

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to migrate to America to escape the severe persecution due to religious beliefs.

We are only one of numerous Amish groups in Montana, Idaho, and Washington who came west from thriving communities in the Midwest. Though the Amish communities differ somewhat from one area to another, the views we share here are held by all.

We desire to serve our God the way our forefathers taught us and not be a hindrance to the society around us. We have been schooled in rural schools for generations long before the modern public school system was implemented. In those days there was no separation between the Amish and other students.

Today it is well established that public school curriculum certified teachers, and all the items set forth on this bill will not produce any higher IQ's or better citizens than the proven methods of private and home schools.

Our local Amish community is of the conviction to ever seek better quality education for our children and encourage to further their education past 8th grade should they choose to do so, and through choosing whichever method is deemed proper by parents and child. We do not however seek more education at the expense of losing our heritage.

We are of the conviction to make our own choices in education while at the same time seeking to satisfy the state school agencies that support the constitution. To remain constitutional is our heart, and furthermore it is proven to the American Education and Cultural Resources that the Amish do use the public school system in some areas of the country for various reasons, citing our tolerance toward their existence. This does not weaken our stand. More laws cannot improve a home or private school system that graduates its children honorably with grade scores that simply cannot be refuted.

Sincerely and most respectfully,
Bishop Lloyd Miller