

May 2001

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Bullying Redefined

Everyone wants children to be safe in our schools. But a bill which supporters claim will help make this a reality has stalled in the state legislature. Rep. Ed Murray, an openly homosexual lawmaker from Seattle, says Christian conservatives are behind the move to kill the measure. This, as you can imagine, has ignited a firestorm in the media.

The bill, which the Christian Coalition of Washington admittedly opposes, is ESSB 5528, the so-called Anti-Bullying Bill. While the title of the bill is new, the contents are not. It has been known by other names in the past, but like the Energizer Bunny, it just keeps popping up year after year. Two years ago when the measure was known as the "Malicious Harassment Bill," 65 legislators signed on as sponsors before reading the fine print. When they did, the bill lost traction quickly.

Although this latest version has been purged of references to sexual, gender and transgender orientations—unlike earlier iterations, we believe there is still cause for concern. The bill, for instance, expands the definition of bullying to include **written** or **verbal** expressions, which could, depending on application, infringe upon free speech rights.

Unfortunately, critics charge us with defending the right of students to harass or verbally assault their classmates - a charge that is untrue and a "right" that we would consider deplorable. Rather, we are concerned with speech in the context of the classroom setting. Students should not be prevented from expressing their opinions on behaviors and lifestyles in their written or oral reports or in casual conversations with their teachers and their peers.

In a glaring example of a bullying bill gone awry, Christian students in a Pennsylvania school district were recently forced to go to court to protect their basic First Amendment rights. In SAXE V. STATE COLLEGE AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT, a federal appeals court ruled that the school district's anti-harassment policy was over broad and violated the rights of the students.

The judges noted that the plaintiffs were students who "openly and sincerely identify themselves as Christians." As such, "they believe, and their religion teaches, that homosexuality is a sin" and they "feel compelled by their religion to speak out" on this and "other topics, especially moral issues."

Continuing their 29-page opinion, the judges found that "No court or legislature has ever suggested that unwelcome speech directed at another's 'values' may be prohibited under the rubric of anti-discrimination...By prohibiting disparaging speech directed at a person's 'values,' the policy strikes at the heart of moral and political discourse—the lifeblood of constitutional self-government (and democratic education) and the core concern of the First Amendment. That speech about 'values' may offend is not cause for its prohibition..."

There is little dispute that when people are talking about "values" or "behavior" these days, they are using the acceptable code words for homosexuality. Face it, the gay lifestyle is the hot-talk in Hollywood, the work place, and at school.

Even so, the media scoffs at any notion of a homosexual agenda underlying the Anti-Bullying legislation. It seems a no-brainer, however, when one considers the bill's most strident supporters include: *The Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network, Lifelong Aids Alliance, Seattle Counseling Service for Sexual Minorities, Seattle Gay Cultural Center, Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) - Seattle, Rainbow Center, Pride Foundation, and Lambert House.*

These organizations are in fact, actively promoting homosexuality in public schools as an acceptable lifestyle and hope to silence any opposition to their message by classifying it as bullying, harassment, or intimidation.

Little more than a year ago, California Governor Gray Davis signed into law, "The California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000." While the bill's effectiveness in preventing violence is questionable in light of recent shootings at two southern California public schools, it can be demonstrated that much has been done to accommodate the goals of The Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network in that state.

A task force appointed by the Governor, has finalized 12 school mandates that require teaching homosexuality as a positive lifestyle in all curricula; uses tax dollars to help establish homosexual teen groups on campuses; and implements a program to punish anyone who criticizes homosexuality in a public school.

In Canada, homosexual behavior is considered a basic "human right" that must be protected by the government. Christian ministry radio programs originating in the U.S., like Focus on the Family, must delete any critical references to homosexuality before they can air in Canada. Canadian homosexuals have largely succeeded in silencing their opposition and criminalizing any criticism against them.

So, are we discouraged because many people have maligned us for our stand in this matter? No, not really. That's what we're here for. Would we rather just share the good news of the gospel and the love of Jesus Christ with our adversaries? Of course. And we do. But we also know that God has eternity in mind when he calls us to warn our generation. We love God and fear Him more than we fear men. Besides, everyone knows we are a peculiar people!

But in the midst of our controversies, God has opened many doors of opportunity for us to be His witnesses. Several weeks ago, two of my colleagues, Bob Higley and Dr. Joe Fuiten and I were invited to meet privately with Attorney General Christine Gregoire to discuss the Anti-Bullying Bill. While the 90-minute meeting was more cordial than productive, it did provide us with an opportunity to be ambassadors for Jesus. We gave her some Christian materials, and before leaving, had a time of prayer together.

Last week, I received a call from a legislator who was angry with me for opposing the Anti-Bullying Bill. I was invited to meet with her to explain my reasoning. During our meeting, she described herself as a "liberal Christian Democrat" who wants to know the truth. PTL! Considering these opportunities and the responses we have received, I think we must be on the right track.

As I close, I want you to know that the governor has made no secret that the Anti-Bullying Bill is high priority for him and that the special session may drag on unless he gets his way. Your representatives need to hear from you that the governor's own bullying tactics are unacceptable. Please see our web site for the contact numbers for your senators and representatives (www.christiancoalition.us).

You can also stand with us through your prayers and financial support. We experienced a substantial shortfall in giving in both December and February and would love to hear from you if it's been a while.

Rick Forcier

Executive Director