

Senate Judiciary Committee

Senate Bill 2307

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Written Testimony

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Madame Chairman Larson and Members of the Committee:

My name is Andrew Alexis Varvel. I live in Bismarck.

I am a member of the local Friends of the Library.

It may be the Tenth of February today, but it feels like Groundhog Day.

Please look at page 2, lines 29-30 and page 3, lines 1-2.

Senate Bill 2307 proposes to put public libraries into the same category as public roadways and public walkways, no longer in the same category as colleges, universities, museums, and art galleries. It says a public library is no better than the street, as if some hooker were going to walk right up to a patron and ask, "Hey man, wanna have a good time?"

(And yes, that did happen to me on Bourbon Street when I was seventeen years old on a band trip. And yes, I was shocked at the time.)

It appears to me that this legislation is aimed at ensuring that children will have no access whatsoever to online books through local libraries.

This should be great news for traffickers, as keeping children ignorant of the horrors that await them will play straight into the traffickers' hands.

It seems that many Christians have forgotten Matthew 10:16 entirely.

Remember – Jesus Christ told his disciples to **first** be as wise as serpents and **then** be as harmless as doves. Not the other way around.

Let's keep our eyes open! Let's treat libraries as places to learn, not as some moral equivalent of Bourbon Street or Hennepin Avenue.

Just yesterday, I performed a test on the computers of the Bismarck Veterans Memorial Library. I checked whether a library computer could access any of the following sites:

pornhub.com porn.com onlyfans.com fansly.com

None of these sites could be accessed through a library computer.

No North Dakota library has any copy of *Debbie Does Dallas* either.

I would encourage any concerned legislator to go to a public library and find out what is – and at least as importantly – what is not available.

I have in my hands three books written by Ellen Key – Love and Marriage, Love and Ethics, and The Renaissance of Motherhood.

I am in the process of reading them.

In 1919 to 1920 during the first Red Scare, there was a press controversy in the pages of the Bismarck Tribune, Grand Forks Herald, and other critics of the NPL that the North Dakota State Library – under Nonpartisan League control at the time – had any of these books. Well, these books are nowhere to be seen among North Dakota libraries.

Anywhere.

Ellen Key's books were called “trash” 125 years ago, so now no patron of a public library in this state gets to check them out.

So, congratulations! Library patrons won't be able to learn whether her books are trash or not.

On page 2, lines 20-21, this proposed legislation says, “Is patently offensive under prevailing standards in the adult community in North Dakota as a whole regarding what is suitable for minors...”

There is absolutely no way anybody can determine what the prevailing moral standards of North Dakota are without holding a referendum. Book by book by book. Instead, what I see within this legislation is the establishment of a moral dictatorship of Legislative Management and the Attorney General – who do not determine the prevailing standards.

I would recommend setting up statewide referenda on each book, book by book by book, except for one thing –

It is city and county taxes that pay for these libraries. Have you ever heard of the idea of local control? If the state government is going to set up statewide standards for these libraries, this would only make sense if the state government *fully funded these libraries!*

As it is, this is an unfunded mandate for cities and counties to navigate mountains of punitive red tape – not a good use for taxpayer money.

So, if the Legislature decides to fully fund city and county libraries, we could then have statewide referenda on each book deemed offensive by someone – book by book by book. And then I would say –

STATE REFERENDUM ON BANNING A BOOK? BRING IT ON!

Maybe somebody will put the Bible on statewide referendum, claiming that the Bible lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value for anybody – including minors. After all, the Bible does have some sexually explicit material such as Ezekiel 23:19-20.

There are references to incest in Genesis 19:30-38. (I think this story was a raucous satire of the cult of Ishtar and temple prostitution.)

And then, there is Isaiah 23:17-18, which promotes temple prostitution.

Beyond the question of who decides what is or is not “sexually explicit material”, we face an epidemic of sex trafficking fueled by a policy to keep children ignorant – rather than become as watchful as serpents.

Children need to know what parts of their body are off-limits. Rectum. Genitalia. Breasts. And knowing that “Tab A goes into Slot B”. Yet, this bill would shield children from knowing how to protect themselves.

From the point of view of prepubescent children, adults do weird and gross things as part of being fruitful and multiplying. Thank God, the Bible has a book dedicated to promoting the right kind of prurience –

The Song of Songs.

Please send Senate Bill 2307 straight into the trash bin where it belongs, and not into our Century Code. Please recommend **DO NOT PASS**.

Thank you. I am open for questions.