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ALA rejects West Bend Community's conference request

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ALA rejects West Bend Community's conference request

I noted on the OIF blog that Deborah Caldwell-Stone had invited West Bend Community Memorial Library supporters to speak at the ALA conference in July.

Since I, too, am a supporter of the West Bend Library and advocate for a large group of parents in West Bend, I asked if she would consider me as well on her panel of speakers from West Bend. I explained that West Bend Citizens for Safe Libraries, like the librarians in West Bend, also want to keep library materials on the shelves, and have confirmed this time and again.

WBCFSL feels that we have much in common with our librarians and West Bend Parents for Free Speech in this respect and would like to be allowed the same opportunities as those who are also leading our community, or providing advocacy in this manner.

This is her response to my request:

I apologize for the delay in responding to your email. It was directed to my spam folder, and I did not discover it until yesterday.

ALA's Annual Conference is intended to provide professional development and educational opportunities for librarians, library trustees, library paraprofessionals, and "Friends of the Library" groups. The panel is not a debate on the merits of West Bend Citizens for Safe Libraries' challenge, or an opportunity for advocacy, but instead a discussion about policy development and management of challenges for the benefit of those four constituencies. We have invited panelists we believe will offer insights and advice on the topic that is consistent with the First Amendment and established ALA policies, such as the Library Bill of Rights and the ALA Code of Ethics.

Thank you for your interest in this program. Though the discussion you propose is outside the program's scope, I am sure there will be future opportunities for such a debate.

*Deborah Caldwell-Stone
Acting Director
Office for Intellectual Freedom
American Library Association
50 East Huron, Chicago, IL 60611
800-545-2433*

Do you see where it says, "the controversy arose in February 2009 when a West Bend couple filed a request to reconsider books"? That's me, I'm part of that "West Bend couple." The ALA is talking about me. One would think the ALA would enjoy having me say something at the conference. I offered, but as you can see, my offer was not accepted.

Instead, the ALA has invited the person that arose to oppose protecting children from inappropriate material, but not me. What exactly is the point of the panel? So people will hear the "censorship" message from only the ALA's point of view? Even if they had me there as the person ALA tribes love to hate, at least that would be more open minded than just cutting out the "West Bend couple" that started it all. Is there nothing we could contribute to "a discussion about policy development and management of challenges"?

I do admit efforts to keep children from inappropriate material are not "consistent with ... established ALA policies, such as the Library Bill of Rights and the ALA Code of Ethics."

52.5.2 Sex Education Materials in Libraries

ALA affirms the right of youth to comprehensive, sex-related education, materials, programs, and referral services of the highest quality; affirms the active role of librarians in providing such; and urges librarians and library educators to reexamine existing policies and practices and assume a leadership role in seeing that information is available for children and adolescents, parents, and youth-serving professionals.

Sex-related materials! Active role! Leadership role! Of librarians! Available for children! Again, I admit efforts to keep children from inappropriate material are inconsistent with ALA policy. Apparently, that is why I have not been invited.

While Ms. Caldwell-Stone states that this panel will not be used as an "opportunity for advocacy," there can be no doubt that the City of West Bend will take a huge hit by the likes of Maria Hanrahan, who clearly opposes the community standards of West Bend, and will be presenting her story due to the generous offer from the ALA, an offer not extended to me.

Naturally, we can only assume that West Bend will be used/abused on a national forefront by the ALA as our very own Michael Tyree, WBCML director, Kristin Pekoll, YA librarian, Mary Reilly-Kliss (former board member) and library board president, Barbara Deters, proudly proclaim their pyrrhic victory over the community they live in, represent, and for some, are paid by.