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Publishers Weekly can't get it right

I'll try to be helpful here...

By Lynn Andriani -- Publishers Weekly, 4/29/2009 8:01:00 AM

Four members of a library board in West Bend, Wis., were dismissed last week for refusing to remove controversial books from the library's young adult section—and yesterday, the American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression, the National Coalition Against Censorship, the Association of American Publishers and PEN American Center criticized the firings.

OK, this is the first boo-boo and very misleading. The four library board members were up for reappointment. The City Council members did not feel they served their community's best interests in a timely manner. They chose to vote down the mayoral appointments. The mayor will simply choose four new members to replace those whose appointment terms were up. No firing; no dismissal. We can see how Ms. Andriani would choose to use that terminology, as it certainly would get the hair on people's backs up! Sounds more like a tabloid than journalism...

The groups sent a letter to the West Bend Common Council stating that the dismissals threatened free speech in two ways: punishing the board members for attempting to apply objective criteria in the selection of books, and pressuring the library to remove the controversial books. The letter said, "The role of a public library and its board members is to serve the entire community and to evaluate books and other library materials on the basis of objective criteria. By removing half the members of the library board, the Common Council is imposing its opinions on the rest of the community."

Let's say this again. Nobody was "removed." Four people's terms were up. That's it. The Council voted not to reappoint. Nothing wrong with that. Perfectly within their right.

The controversy began in February when two patrons complained that the library's YA section included fiction and nonfiction books about gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender issues. The patrons accused the library of promoting "the overt indoctrination of the gay agenda in our community" and demanded that the library add books "affirming traditional heterosexual perspectives." They also insisted that the library remove books from the YA section including Brent Hartinger's *Geography Club* (HarperCollins), Stephan Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* and Esther Drill's *Deal With It! A Whole New Approach to Your Body, Brain and Life as a gURL* (both Simon & Schuster).

Please see excerpts for these books to the left of this post. Furthermore, Ms. Andriani is not giving the entire story in an informative way. She omits that the books were asked to be placed in a different area of the library, still accessible to young adults, but out of the reach of younger children. A perfectly reasonable request, considering the explicit nature of the materials.

Last week, West Bend Mayor Kristin Deiss submitted the names of four members of the library board for a new three-year term, and the council voted 5-3 to dismiss the board members. The letter to the Common Council is available online [here](#).

The pressure to force the Common Council to keep the same library board members after they have made their decision not to reappoint is unjustified. The City Council strongly stated that the library board had dragged out the issue much too long, refusing to address the issue and "stonewalling" the complainants. If a Common Council does not feel ANY board members serving the community, no matter what the capacity, in the best interests of the community in an appropriate manner, they have every right to reject the appointments. And they did.