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Private school rights debated

By Randy Essex

Members of the Legislature's Education Committee were warned Tuesday that the state could be left without any control of even public schools if a bill is not passed exempting private, denominational and parochial schools from that control.

LB403, introduced by North Platte Sen. Myron Rumery, would remove such private schools from restrictions regarding accreditation and certification of teachers.

Representing Rumery, who was out of the state, was Mrs. Max Vanarsdall, who warned the committee that court history shows parents have the right to educate their children however they wish, and their right supercedes the state's right.

"A group of Christian people have had to come before the Legislature to ask for something to get an explicitly stated constitutional right," Vanarsdall said.

Blair Sen. Walter George expressed concern that the bill would allow cults to open schools in the state, and could not be regulated.

Risks with freedom

"You have a problem when you begin to infringe on religious rights," Vanarsdall replied.

"With freedom goes risk," Everett Silivan, a Louisville pastor told the senators.

Silivan said weekday education programs of churches are an important part of "teaching the theistic lifestyle demanded by our God."

He said the state could find itself without control if it pursues six lawsuits it has filed against families wishing to educate their children in the ways of "their God."

"Those of us who don't want money from the state, who don't want regulation, should be allowed our academic freedom," Silivan said.

"I don't want you to think we protect our children," he said. "We teach them about communism, but we teach them what's wrong with it, not what's right about it like the public schools do."

"Our heroes are George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, not Martin Luther King, Jr. and some of the other civil rights leaders," the Baptist pastor said.

Book beefs

Several proponents of the bill said they feel it is unfair to have to buy certain books in compliance with the State Depart-

ment of Education guidelines.

But Stan Carlson, representing the department said there are no book lists published by the state which mandate what a school must have in its library.

Silivan and Gilbert Neumann, a board member of the Temple Christian Academy in Omaha, said their schools are required to buy books that differ from what they want taught in their schools.

Silivan said the books are marked off limits to pupils. Neumann said his school marks the books as not having been accepted by the board as fact.

All supporters of the bill argued that standardized tests show that students in private schools receive a "superior education."

"We're asking for a right that already exists," Neumann said.

But Carlson said it is the traditional obligation of the state to assure education of all the children in the state. He said passage of the bill would interfere with the duties of truant officers.

"A parent could simply say that a school has just been established in this home when the officer comes to check on the truant child," Carlson said.

Carlson said the regulations imposed by the state are not strict. He said the state requires that certain courses be taught, but does not mandate the content or methodology of those courses.

Also appearing in opposition to the bill was a representative of Nebraska Council of School Administrators.

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