

What's Wrong with the Tebow Bill?

An Open Letter to Texas Homeschoolers

by Fred Watt

My name is Fred Watt. My wife Terri and I have been homeschooling our eight children for over 20 years. We are on the board of directors of the Conroe Area Christian Home Educators (CACHE), representing over 150 homeschooling families in the Montgomery County area. I am also the director of the Northside Falcons, a Christian homeschool baseball program, also based in Montgomery County.

I recently testified before the Texas House Committee on Public Education in opposition to the so-called "Tebow Bill" (HB 1374). Since that time, and even before then, I have been asked by others why it is that we would be against this bill which, on the surface appears to be opening up the door for further opportunities for homeschoolers by forcing the public schools to allow homeschoolers to participate in UIL-sanctioned activities such as sports teams, arts and sciences competitions, and more.

And, in fact, that is how it is being presented to us by proponents of the bill, including the Texas Homeschool Coalition (THSC). But while THSC has done some wonderful work on behalf of homeschoolers in the past, we believe they are coming down on the wrong side on this issue and should instead be standing with us in opposition.

In order for you to make a qualified decision for yourself, I am here laying out the case against this piece of legislation. It is my hope that you will give it careful consideration rather than placing blind trust in either side.

The Bill (HB1374, also referred to as the "Tebow Bill")

Okay, for starters, a copy of the bill itself can be found here (don't worry...it's very short):

<http://legiscan.com/TX/text/HB1374>

You should also compare this with the substitute bill that came out of the senate committee, which can be read here (also very short):

<http://legiscan.com/TX/text/SB929>

Ultimately, any bill passed into law will have to be approved by both houses, so the end piece of legislation will no doubt look more like the senate bill, which includes a definition of homeschool. Nevertheless, on the surface, this legislation looks like a Very Good Thing. Or, at worst, innocuous. It is only when actually thinking it through and considering its implications that we see the problems -- both immediate and long-term -- that are inherent in this bill.

And with that, I would ask you to consider the following:

Legal Implications

The most common objection to this bill, and in fact one that I strongly agree with, is the danger it poses to the current freedoms we enjoy as Texas homeschoolers. While I touched on this in my own testimony, I was also testifying to several other problems. Because it was not my sole focus, my own testimony dilutes the importance of this central issue.

However, a colleague in the opposition who testified after me focused almost exclusively on this theme, and did such an awesome job of laying out the case against this bill from both a historical and legal perspective, that I feel it useful to include his entire statement verbatim. Like me, Jeremy was unable to get his entire prepared statement in. However, it is now a matter of the public record and based on the reaction of some of the committee members, we can be confident that they have read the entire thing. If you don't read anything else on this subject (including the rest of my own commentary), you owe it to yourself to read this. It is a compelling argument, highly informative and in fact very interesting. I assure you that you will be more educated on the subject after reading this.

My name is Jeremy Blosser. I am representing Texas Home Educators as well as myself, my wife, and our 5 home schooled children. We are opposed to HB 1374.

Mr. Chair, Members, Texas Home Educators is a communication network of 20,000 home schoolers in Texas, founded in 1994. While we have great respect for the Texas Home School Coalition and Mr. Lambert and the work they have done to support home schools in Texas, we must disagree with them on this bill and feel it is important to register our opposition and note that THSC does not speak for all home schoolers in Texas on this issue. There is a lot of opposition among many home schoolers to this bill and I believe your offices have been hearing from some of that opposition. You are also hearing from some of it here today, and as others will likely focus on specific issues with the bill, I want to speak a bit on opportunity.

One of the things proponents of this bill are suggesting is that this is an equal opportunity issue and those of us that oppose it are opposing opportunity for others that does not affect us if we don't choose to participate. This is not the case. If this were a true equal opportunity bill, it would be open to all students, and that might be something we could support. Instead it carves out opportunity for a specific group with a set definition, and that definition is what we are concerned with because we believe it would restrict opportunity those of us who home school currently have. We believe it would do this even if we choose not to take advantage of the provisions of this bill.

Historically, Texas has had two systems parents have been able to choose from when providing for the education of our children—the public schools, defined and regulated by the state, and the private schools, not regulated by the state. Not being regulated has included not being divided into categories of home schools vs. private schools or different categories of private schools. This has been the state of the law for a very long time and was the central finding of the landmark Leeper decision of the Texas Supreme Court in 1994. This has allowed for a true market approach to education in Texas private schools, where parents are free to educate their children directly in their own home, or share that responsibility among several families, or take advantage of any of the part-time academies or curriculum programs offered in the state, and recently moving into utilizing online and related educational offerings. Most other states do not allow this incredible level of opportunity, and this was a primary reason my own family moved to Texas. We use this opportunity every time we get together with other families to study theatre or lab sciences as a group or take advantage of one parent's particular expertise on a given issue.

The states that don't allow this kind of opportunity don't allow it first by means of definition. Home schools in those states are defined as education provided by the individual parents to their own children in their own home, or similar. Any cooperative effort by groups of parents cross the line

into those states' definition of private schools, which requires accreditation and/or licensing and all other manner of regulatory overhead. This is the case in Arizona, which the proponents of HB 1374 continually point to favorably as a low-regulation state with a good Tebow law. Arizona may be low regulation for home school families, but they have a strict definition of home school that does not allow any cooperation. Simply put, regulation is not the primary problem in Arizona, definition is, and they don't have the same liberty to lose that Texas has. Tim Tebow himself was from Florida, which is by no means a low regulation state but also has separate categories in the law for individual home schools vs cooperative efforts. Their Tebow bill only applies to the individual home school category.

This bill brings the same thing to Texas. When I spoke against the parallel bill in that other chamber's committee, I noted that it lacked definitions and had a lot of ambiguous terms that would have to be defined before the law could even be applied. The proponents apparently agreed with me on that point, because the substitute that they passed out removed most of that ambiguity in favor of specific testing requirements and hard definitions of terms, including the term "home school child". Proponents are quick to note that this definition was already in the code in relation to a previously passed bill allowing home school students to take the PSAT, but that really just proves our point—adding these things to the law in one place will inevitably cause them to get added other places, and the argument that we don't need to worry about these testing requirements or definitions because they are optional does not survive the test of time. Adding a definition to allow for PSAT testing was a bad idea, and extending it to other parts of the code is a worse idea. This is not an argument borne out of irrational fear. Surely no one believes that if this bill passes, and another, and another, that there will not come a day when there is a single statutory definition for all home schooling in Texas. The Leeper court looked for a definition in the law to determine if there were bounds a home school needed to fall within to qualify for the public school attendance exemption. They did not find one, and noted the legislature had explicitly declined to create one. With these bills, that is no longer the case.

Extending opportunity in the form of government programs always requires definition, and those definitions always by their nature will allow some opportunity and restrict others. Others' desire for a specific opportunity does not give them any right to restrict our opportunity, and that is what is at issue here.

I urge you to oppose passage of HB 1374. Thank you.

Texas homeschoolers owe Jeremy a debt of gratitude for the time he's spent in researching this issue and testifying on it so eloquently.

Other Implications

But that's not the end of the story. There are so many other reasons to oppose this bill that it practically boggles the mind when one uses just a little bit of imagination. To set this up, I would challenge the reader to begin by acknowledging that homeschoolers, of all people, *ought* to know how to think outside the box. Because I am asking now that you do just that as I take you on a bit more roundabout journey through the dangers posed by HB 1374.

Social/Political Backlash

In my own testimony, I was asked whether or not my interest might not be self-serving. The implication was that because I directed a homeschool sports program, I was somehow wanting to protect my own

turf, rather than risk a homeschool player going over to a public school team. The committee member then removed any uncertainty:

Representative Villareal: *Are you concerned that a homeschool player will choose a public school team over your own program?*

My answer ran something like this:

Fred Watt: *No sir, not at all. As you'll see in my statement, we work year-round in the development of our players and this is something that we don't believe the public schools can compete with. In fact, I'll put our program up against theirs any day. After all, who is the typical homeschool athlete going to want to play for, a public school that is routinely beaten by a homeschool team [my statement provided the context for this claim], or the homeschool team itself?*

This seemed to satisfy Representative Villareal. However, this does not actually mean that no self-serving interest exists, just that this isn't it. No, my self-serving interest has much more to do with the backlash that I see as inevitable if this bill were to pass. And in this context, my self-interest is by no means mine alone. On the contrary, in addition to affecting Texas homeschoolers in general, I think this would have a particularly negative affect on the thousands of homeschool extra-curricular programs that have developed throughout the state. And to get that across, a little history is needed.

In its infancy, homeschooling suffered a fair bit of hostility. Homeschool parents were commonly defending themselves against claims ranging from the benign (foolishness) to the horrific (child abuse). This is somewhat understandable. Homeschooling was new...and unknown. That which is unknown almost always leads to suspicion (whether justified . . . or not, as it was in the case of homeschooling). Suspicion often leads to fear (on the part of at least some), which typically leads to condemnation, anger, and even hatred . . . in short, animosity.

But as we know, over the last couple of decades, as the homeschool movement has grown and expanded, this animosity has largely disappeared. Not completely, of course, but to a great extent the dust has settled, the suspicions have abated, and we have reached a measure of peace between homeschoolers, privateschoolers, and publicschoolors. (Hey, if we can butcher our own label in so many ways, we can certainly do it with others, yes?)

This level of harmony can be attributed to several things. The most obvious is time. Time does indeed tend to settle things, particularly if unjustified suspicions prove to be unsupported.

The second aspect is growth. As homeschooling has become more and more popular, represented by people from all social, economic and occupational walks of life, it has quite naturally been deemed considerably less...well...weird.

But another aspect is the movement itself, and how we have presented ourselves. This can be seen most publicly in the way that the directors, planners, schedulers and other volunteers involved in homeschool extracurricular activities have been able to build bridges with the programs and students within the public and private school sectors.

Time was when it was very difficult to get a public or private school athletic team to consider competing against a compatible homeschool team. That difficulty has diminished greatly and is, in my opinion, on the edge of extinction. There are still a few schools that won't play homeschool teams, but they are

becoming more and more rare. To understand this clearly, I want to illustrate two different philosophies that exist within the public school athletic arena.

On the one side, you will have a coach or AD who considers the idea of playing a homeschool team a lose/lose situation. If his team wins, there is no glory to be had because, after all...*it was just a homeschool team*. If his team loses, he considers it a great humiliation.

On the other side, you will have coaches who, to begin with, are considerably less insecure. These coaches consider games against good homeschool teams as win/win situations. For starters, if they lose, it does not count against their district standings. And they don't consider it *particularly* shameful if they lose to a good team. By the same token, they see a win as a win, and if they can beat a good team -- homeschool or otherwise -- they know they've done well (translated: there is indeed glory to be had). More importantly, if the homeschool team has, say, a strong pitcher who throws an 88 mph fastball with movement, coupled with a 2-1/2 foot break on his curveball, and can locate his pitches...guess what? The secure coach sees this as an opportunity to prepare his hitters for what they might face in district playoffs and the state tournament; again, at no cost to his own team's standings. As an extra bonus, he doesn't have to worry about revealing any of his own strengths to a team that he might later have to face when it really matters.

So you see, a lot still depends on the individual schools in question. But more and more coaches are seeing it from the latter perspective.

This is not an accident. I and others like me around the state, along with thousands of volunteers, have worked very hard to forge these relationships and they are good, strong, healthy relationships. Understand that this isn't just about sports. Science, arts and other academic competitions are starting to enjoy the same level of competitive camaraderie.

Now let's see what happens when we upset the apple cart.

Consider what will occur the first time a homeschool player steps on to a public school team. Let's look at an example:

Johnny and Joey are both Sophomores. Both are point guards. Both are exceptional players...so good in fact that, as young as they are, either one of them would be a starter on most high school Varsity basketball teams. Johnny is a homeschooler. Joey is enrolled in the local public school in the same district that Johnny lives in. The team already has a great shooting guard (a Junior), so it gets down to a choice between Johnny and Joey for the starting point guard position and the coach chooses Johnny as the starter (though Joey makes the team as well).

It doesn't take much imagination to consider the reaction of, say, Joey's mother. And I think a case can be made that her outrage would be justified. After all, she attends all the PTA meetings. She's worked tirelessly for the booster club. Every stitch of clothing in her house is green, yellow, or both (the school colors). She baked a cake just last week for the school nurse and her husband volunteers as a mentor for the school's science club. Oh, she also has another son (a Senior) who is the star quarterback on the school's all-state football team and just won a full-ride scholarship to a Division I university.

It is by no means unrealistic to consider something along these lines. Any one of these factors regarding Joey's mother (or none at all) would still be enough to ignite passions of animosity toward Johnny, the coach, the lawmakers who passed "such a ridiculous law", and of course, homeschoolers in general. If

you don't believe this, then it's likely you haven't been around many parents of athletes. The gossip will start with the parents of the other non-starters. It may spread to the mom of another starter who happens to be close friends with Joey, who himself already thinks the coach made the wrong decision. The resentment will only grow from there.

Now imagine this taking place on the other teams in the school, along with the drama department (lead roles?), the math team, even the chess club. Then multiply that across the district and then across the other 1200+ school districts in the state.

Anyone who thinks this won't lead to backlash is fooling himself. And one of the first victims of that backlash is going to be the existing homeschool extra-curricular programs that wish to continue competing alongside the public school teams. *"Well, if we're going to play them anyway, why doesn't Johnny just go over there?"*

So, does my concern sort of include a self-interest that kind of correlates to my involvement in homeschool sports? Sure...in part. And only by extension. More importantly, it is based on the *shared* interest of thousands of directors, volunteers, and participants in the myriad homeschool extra-curricular programs that go well beyond athletics. And *most* important, it is based on the *general* interest of the nearly 200,000 homeschoolers throughout the state.

I'm curious as to how many of us really want to go back to the days when the suspicions, fears, and hostility against homeschoolers were the norm rather than the exception. Because that is where passage of HB1374 would inevitably take us. There will be repercussions for us all.

As a side note, it is interesting to point out that one of the arguments the proponents of this measure like to put forth is that homeschoolers need this opportunity in order to get the kind of exposure (scouts, scholarships, etc.) that public school players get. In addition to completely debunking this in my prepared statement (we get scouts, we get scholarships, etc.), isn't it a bit interesting that there is no concern about the exposure the public school player like Joey is going to *lose* because he is riding the bench rather than starting...or is perhaps the last cut and doesn't make the team at all?

One-sided fairness is an oxymoron.

But make no mistake: Backlash isn't the only problem. It and the legal implications related by Jeremy represent some of the *practical* implications of this legislation. But there are other problems as well...problems of *principle*.

Faulty Justifications

I find it highly ironic and in fact a bit hypocritical that so many homeschoolers -- those of us who are quick to self-identify as conservative Christians, and profess a strong affinity toward a strict constructionist view of the Constitution -- would be jumping on the bandwagon to push something that effectively amounts to . . . *an entitlement!*

Allow me to explain.

In my testimony (I don't even remember the question that was asked), I said something that ran like this:

Fred Watt: Many of us [homeschoolers] are just now learning about this issue and haven't really had time to think it through. I didn't even know I would be testifying here until two days ago. So my prepared statement doesn't nearly cover the bases as well as I would like.

But during the 14 hours that I've been here today, I've had a lot of time to think this through. And one of the things that has occurred to me is that the only card the proponents of this bill have to play is that homeschoolers ought to be entitled to the same thing as the public school students because, after all...we pay property taxes, too!

*According to this argument, homeschoolers ought to have full access to the public school offerings, opportunities, etc....that it is somehow our **right!***

But here's the thing. People make decisions throughout their lives that require the setting aside of some rights. When I got married, I had to sacrifice some of my rights. Same thing when I had children. A man who joins the army sets aside a lot of rights. So does someone who joins the clergy.

Now, parents make the decision to homeschool for all sorts of different reasons. And it is almost always a difficult decision. But when they do, they are in essence saying that they reject the public school model as the model they want for their children. And I'm just not sure it's reasonable to then turn around and require that the rejected model be modified to accommodate the one who has rejected it. In other words, the very decision to homeschool means that you are by definition setting aside some rights, if they were indeed rights at all.

This got head nods from a few of the representatives, but it may have been those who were already opposed to the measure. I don't know. I also don't know whether I was particularly clear in what I was saying. What I do know is that on the drive home from Austin -- I always have a better answer about ten minutes after I need it! -- I came up with an analogy that I think is about as close as I can possibly get to illustrating the crux of the issue here.

Consider Jimmy, a 17 year old high school Junior. He is 6'1", athletic, and well-liked. He never gets in trouble, and he maintains a consistently above-the-median grade-point average. Oh, and Jimmy is a Mennonite...meaning, among other things, that he is non-resistant (i.e., he doesn't believe in killing or fighting). Incidentally, it technically doesn't matter whether Jimmy is home-schooled, or a student enrolled in a public or private school. He could be a drop-out and I don't think it would affect the analogy here.

So here's Jimmy, in his Junior year, considering what he is going to do after high school. Should he work? Should he go to college? Should he try to do both? One day, a career counselor suggests the army to him, but he immediately rejects that as being inconsistent with his convictions. And rightly so.

But the next day, Jimmy gets to thinking:

*Y'know, my parents pay a lot of taxes. Even I paid taxes last summer working at the hardware store. Come to think of it, the Army's not **all** bad. Not that I would actually enlist and go to war or anything. But I certainly wouldn't mind getting those commissary prices. For that matter, I could use a little beefing up and some of the training they have is pretty good, too. At the very least, I should take advantage of the GI Bill and get my education. After all, I pay into that system, I should have a right to take part in some of it, right?*

This is by no means a perfect analogy. But it underscores an important point: Is something like this even remotely reasonable? Would we actually entertain this thought and consider granting any of

Jimmy's requests on the grounds that as a taxpayer he is entitled to some of the taxpayer subsidized Army benefits without taking the whole package? Of course not.

You see, it all boils down to a question of models. As Jeremy Blosser put it, there are "the public schools, defined and regulated by the state, and the private schools, not regulated by the state". And of course home schools are considered private schools in Texas. As homeschoolers, we have the right to reject the public school model. We are then free to do as we please with very little restriction as long as we are not breaking any laws. But in making this decision, we are rejecting the public model, and that means the entire package. We are choosing liberty (with all of its trappings) *over* equality (with all of *its* trappings).

What has happened to the homeschool community when we begin pushing for things like this? What happened to our love affair with the principle of limited government? Or legislative restraint? When did we stop looking for creative solutions and start looking to the government to solve our problems?

Not All Rights are Created Equal

I believe the disconnect comes from a basic failure to compartmentalize. We tend to see Rights as a universal concept, as if they were a general principle to be understood en masse. Thus, even when we succeed in prioritizing them for our own personal application, we can often fail to recognize some fundamental, critical distinctions. I think it would be helpful in understanding the issue at hand (HB 1374, that is) to go over these distinctions, in order to determine if a genuine right even exists here.

And for that, we need to take a detour.

Let's start with natural, God-given rights. These include the "unalienable" rights that Jefferson enshrined in the Declaration of Independence, namely Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. These represent critical rights which all men possess and which can only be taken away by force. The founders of our country did not create these rights, as they are not rights which can even *be* created. These kinds of rights are simply *discovered*. The founders were merely continuing the tradition of other thinkers who had begun to look at these things within the context of what is referred to as Common Law (or Natural Law). Natural rights do not convey any kind of *special* privilege, nor do they guarantee any kind of *beneficial outcome*. They merely represent the fundamental requirements a free people need in order to attempt to make the most out of the lives God has given them. Basically, as long as a person doesn't trample on someone else's rights, he is free to do as he chooses.

It is both interesting and instructive to note the order of these rights. Without Life, Liberty means very little; and without Liberty, it is next to impossible to pursue happiness. Or put another way, these rights only apply to the living who, when given the liberty to do so, can pursue happiness.

Next you have what we call Constitutional Rights, specifically those listed in our Bill of Rights. They also do not guarantee any particular outcome. These are rights which our founding fathers deemed as absolutely critical for maintaining a free society; they were universally acknowledged and universally applied. Some of them were the natural offshoots of *protecting* the right to Life, or *defining* the right to Liberty. In short, they were meant to provide assurances to the people that life and liberty would be protected, so that they could then *pursue* happiness. The Pursuit of Happiness was the end game, Life and Liberty were the means to that end.

Thus, the Constitution itemizes a number of rights to assure the protection of life and the definition of liberty. The First Amendment defines Liberty as including the right to speak freely and assemble when, where and with whom you wish. The Second Amendment codifies the right to protect one's own Life from all comers. The Third through Eighth specifically restrict what government can do by assuring individuals' privacy and property rights, right to a jury trial, etc., as well as restraining the government by prohibiting indirect abuses, such as failure to provide due process and a speedy trial, or direct abuses such as cruel and unusual punishment, double jeopardy, etc.

The 9th and 10th Amendments assured the people that these itemized rights were by no means their only rights, but that if there was no prohibition here, then they were free to do as they please, subject only to their own states' prohibitions, which had to follow a similar model (Article IV, Section 4).

Okay, I know that was a bit of a digression. But it's important for understanding rights. All of these Constitutional rights -- though we would do better to refer to them as *Constitutionally-protected* rights -- are merely extensions of the right to Life and right to Liberty. Again, they apply universally to everyone (no special privileges) and they do not guarantee any kind of beneficial outcome.

The problem comes in when governments (or anyone, for that matter) try to define the Pursuit of Happiness. After all, the only way they can begin to do that is to attempt to define happiness, which of course is different for everyone. I would be happy eating pizza three times a week...others wouldn't. Anyway, in an attempt to do this, our own governments (federal, state, and local) have deviated from protecting and defining life and liberty, and have moved into looking for extensions to the right to pursue happiness. And they don't exist. At least not naturally.

Examples of this can be found in the ideas behind the supposed "rights" to a "free" education, welfare, universal healthcare, etc. What the government has done in these instances is to create rights out of thin air, based on things that we value. If in general people value education, then voila', let's create a right that assures everyone gets it. If healthcare is good, let's create a right to that. What, we have poor people? Well, how on earth can they pursue happiness like that? Let's give them some money. Hungry people? Let's give them some food. In other words, these are not God-given, inalienable rights. They are special, Man-Made rights that convey beneficial outcomes. Otherwise known as privileges...or entitlements.

Part of this is due to the Church abdicating its role. When separation of church and state was such a hotbed issue several decades ago, Christians (when they acknowledged it at all) made the argument that this concept was there to protect the church from the intrusions of the state, not the other way around. And while there may be some validity to that, they neglected a more important argument. What they should have said was: "Separation of church and state? Fine. Then get the state out of charity! After all, that is clearly a role of the church." But as this argument was never voiced, the clear distinction of roles became blurred. The church, which had been doing a fantastic job in the areas of education, welfare and, yes, even healthcare, began to acquiesce to government intrusions in these areas. Their capitulation on issues like non-profit status, tax deductions, and political silence just made matters worse.

Anyway, that's only part of the problem. The other part boils down to individuals acting in accordance with this lack of clear principle. For example, many individuals will only give a charitable donation if it's tax deductible. This itself is partly due to excessive taxation, which is somewhat understandable. Nevertheless, it is a sacrifice of principle.

Under these circumstances, we've created a society that is unable or unwilling to address the actual core issues (property taxes, compulsory education, over-regulation, etc.) and have instead opted to simply try and make sure that they get the most out of the bad systems. Rather than going after any genuine evils, they press instead for their "fair share" of whatever the evil happens to provide as a public "benefit".

Hence, the current push for allowing those who have chosen to reject the public school model to try and get one of the benefits of the public school model. It is a move which not only poses real dangers to the community requesting it, but also lacks a basic position of principle in its foundation. There is no actual right, merely the illusion of a right based on an underlying social ill. This is the mindset of a lobbyist.

Which brings me to a question: Do we as the homeschooling community in Texas want a lobbyist, who looks to put forth legislation for our benefit, or do we want a watchdog who simply stands in the gap to protect us against injustice? This is not a semantic question. It carries implications beyond the immediate issue, just as the immediate issue carries implications beyond itself. Among other things, the answer to this question will reveal the kind of image that we want to convey.

Image

So, what image do we want to project as homeschoolers?

Do we want to be seen as a) *those independent thinkers; pioneers in the realm of education, who stick to their principles and look for creative solutions rather than looking to the government to solve their problems; who aren't trying to dictate to others, but instead just want to be left alone to make the educational decisions for their own individual families?*

Or do we want to risk coming across as b) *those arrogant self-absorbed hypocrites who want to have their cake and eat it too; who talk big about limited government, but aren't shy about making sure they get their cut; those spineless whiners who insist that the rest of us bend over backward to accommodate them while they spit in our face with regard to our own model?*

Because in addition to the very real dangers that HB1374 poses with regard to defining and restricting homeschooling; in addition to the backlash that is sure to follow in the wake of anyone actually taking advantage of the supposed benefit; and in addition to the lack of principle that underlies the whole thing...in addition to all of that, one of the above descriptions -- or something very close to it -- is going to emerge as the dominant stereotype.

For what it's worth, if any non-homeschoolers are reading this, I urge you not to lump us all in together, regardless of the outcome of this bill. The homeschooling community in Texas is extremely diverse. There will be those who support this bill and those, like me, who oppose it. Different people will support or oppose it on different grounds. Others won't even care about. And there will likely remain many who don't even *know* about it.

That said, please count me among the (a)-group, at least to the extent that you're willing to credit such lofty attributes. ☺

For the homeschooling community, I would ask that you carefully consider the above points, and contact your state representative to let your voice be heard (contact information is located in the appendix to this letter). And I would ask that you consider one last point:

Conclusion

In 313 AD, Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, formally recognizing Christianity as a legitimate, *legal* religion. Prior to that time, Christianity was *illegal* and in various pockets of the empire Christians suffered a great deal of persecution. During that time, Christians had to *count the cost* of becoming a Christian. They knew what they were getting into. They knew the risks. They knew their decision would require sacrifice. But after the Edict of Milan, Christianity became immensely popular; after all, even the Emperor was now a Christian. With this popularity, people no longer *had* to count the cost. Something akin to a country club mentality spread throughout Christendom, and eventually special privileges were even granted to Christians. The lines became blurred between autonomy and security. Between integrity and expedience. Between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdoms of this World. Between church and state. As a result, the organic, vibrant nature of the Church suffered. It's as if Satan said, "Okay, persecution didn't work, let's try accommodation."

Now I'm not suggesting that the decision to homeschool is on the same level as a decision to follow Jesus Christ. I'm merely pointing out that decisions have consequences, and that the harder decisions often require more sacrifice than the easier ones. This is axiomatic...otherwise the decisions wouldn't be hard. Also, that getting in bed with the government is never a healthy move for an otherwise independent entity.

In closing, I feel it a great privilege to live in Texas where the homeschool community is so creative, so energetic, and so diverse, while still possessing an element of its pioneer roots. I think this is all directly attributable to the hands-off approach that our state government has taken. By contrast, I think that government involvement of any kind would compromise the integrity of the model (and the public school model, too, for that matter). As the lines became more and more blurred, all semblance of independence would disappear. Ultimately, it would destroy what it means to be a homeschooler.

I hope you will join me in standing up and speaking out against this bill. HB 1374 is not a good move for Texas homeschoolers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Fred Watt".

Fred Watt
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PS - The above represents my analysis of *some* of the problems with HB 1374. I challenge the reader to consider the implications for himself. I'm convinced that with a little imagination, you will no doubt discover some entirely different objections of your own.

Appendix

Contact Information

All of your representatives, including your state senator and state representative can be found by going to the following URL and entering your address:

<http://www.fyi.legis.state.tx.us/>

You should also contact the eleven members of the House Committee on Public Education:

<http://www.house.state.tx.us/committees/committee/?committee=400>

Resources

Text of HB 1374, as introduced in committee:

<http://legiscan.com/TX/text/HB1374>

Text of SB 929 (the companion bill in the Senate) - This is the substitute bill that came out of the Senate committee:

<http://legiscan.com/TX/text/SB929>

Talking Points on the Tebow Bill, prepared by Jeremy Blosser:

http://txlege.ocati.org/d/tebow_talking_points.pdf