

Treon Goossen, co-wrote our current homeschooling law and continues to fight for our homeschool freedoms. She has a website for legislative issues. Her site, www.R0828.com, features information on homeschooling, links to state and federal government websites, national news organizations, and much more. The e-blog archives the legislative updates and email alerts that are sent out from her website (see below). Visit often and stay informed. You can also get on her group email list for updates on what's going on legislatively and what action is needed as we seek to protect our freedom to homeschool.

Treon wrote this article about the current threats to homeschool freedoms. We thought it was very insightful for us as homeschoolers. There are so many homeschool options out there for us to participate in, so it's good to hear what those who fight for our freedoms have been finding out about what's going on around us. At High Country, we don't limit our membership to certain homeschool styles, choices, or whether or not you participate in other programs. We just want to offer an opportunity to walk life together. We believe that parents are prayerfully making decisions about their lives and that of their children's education and in many cases have lots of factors that play into these decisions. As Treon says at the bottom of her letter, we don't want to condemn anyone's choices or cause guilt, but we do believe it's important to hear the thoughts of those who fight for our freedom to homeschool and any trends they are seeing as our government and school systems want to regain control and the finances of homeschool families. We believe it's important to make informed decisions.

Please take a few moments to read this article. Thanks for taking the time to be informed!

Please contact me if you have any questions.

~Pam High Country Support Group Administrator, SGAdmin@hche.org

Current Threats to Homeschool Freedoms by Treon Goossen

I recently had the privilege of giving a workshop at the 2008 Christian Home Educators of Colorado (CHEC) conference on the 20th anniversary and history of the homeschool statute here in Colorado. As a co-author of that statute and heavily involved in its passage I always enjoy telling that particular story. It is the story of how Colorado went from one of the ten most dangerous states in which to homeschool to one of the best in the nation.

I am frequently asked what I consider to be the greatest dangers that homeschool families face here in Colorado and in the nation. I would have to say that the National Education Association still ranks very high on the list. The liberal judges and a biased judicial system, as was recently witnessed in California, are definitely factored in. The increasing attack on parental rights and religious freedom directly impact homeschooling in America. However, there is also a more subtle attack, which like the waves of the ocean is steadily wearing away the foundation of independent homeschooling. It is a covert operation, steadily gaining ground in stripping parental control from homeschools. It has been so craftily disguised and marketed to the homeschool community that many have not seen the dangers until the damage has been done. Just ask the homeschooling community in Alaska. I am referring to public school enrollment programs designed for homeschoolers.

When I first became active in the homeschooling community 24 years ago, public schools wanted absolutely nothing to do with homeschools. If they could not control them, as thankfully the law in Colorado established clearly, homeschools were left to their certain demise. These non-public home-based educational programs would fail and return to the brick and mortar schools. Imagine their disappointment when not only did homeschoolers experience extraordinary success but grew by leaps and bounds. This caused much consternation in the public school community. Funding for school districts was becoming a major issue as well as the lack of control of these homeschooled students. Districts and educational entities knew they could not force homeschoolers back into their system so they began to think of ways to entice them voluntarily. And so the erosion of parental control began.

Dual enrollment programs began to spring up in districts around the state. Under the guise of "you are still homeschooling" public schools began to offer classes geared for homeschoolers to "fill in the gaps" of their education. After all, homeschoolers are doing a "credible" job but cannot possibly supply the "well-rounded education taught by educational professionals" that is necessary for success in life. Virtual public schools began to appear and add more to the proverbial carrot by offering free computers, curriculum, and other enticements. Charter schools began offering homeschool programs. The public school system has slowly but surely over time infiltrated the homeschool community and has steadily eroded parental freedom in education. They say it is "all homeschooling." This blurring of the lines of independent homeschools and the public school programs at home is a dangerous slippery slope.

I have personally heard legislators in committees state that "it is all homeschooling." When these types of statements are reiterated over and over again, people begin to believe them. That is why politicians come up with campaign slogans and businesses such as fast food chains have catchy little phrases and songs. If repeated often enough anything becomes believable. The public school system wants the public/parents to believe that "it is all homeschooling" so when they make their move to eliminate the control of parents over their independent

homeschools and thrust them back under state control – it will appear to be the most natural thing to do. “After all, so many parents have voluntarily placed themselves under state control by participating in such programs, this must be what all homeschoolers need. Homeschooling can be simplified by being placed under state supervision where all aspects are under the same guidelines and use the same curriculum. By this the state can be assured that quality education is taking place.”

If this sounds far fetched to you I assure you it is not. I have witnessed the evolution of such programs at an alarming rate. I have seen parents voluntarily give up all or partial control over their homeschools for various reasons. These programs which require enrollment in the public school system limit parental control, bring regulation, involve licensed teacher oversight, have mandatory testing usually involving the state test (in Colorado the CSAP), utilize either a state curriculum or curriculum approved by the state, possible home visits, and more.

One insidious tactic used by the public schools is to infer that homeschool parents are not capable of providing an adequate education on their own. They play on the emotions of parents and tug on the heart strings of insecurities to make the argument that homeschooled children cannot possibly succeed in life with only parental involvement. They plant seeds of doubt and water them with their answer to this imagined dilemma – “let us help you and it won’t cost you anything.” In actuality, there is a very high cost to pay. It is the cost of losing the hard won freedoms for parental control over homeschools. It is the cost of not being able to teach from a curriculum supporting personal and Biblical convictions. It is the cost of losing all that has been gained over the past 20 years. All of this not from a direct attack but from an implosion carefully crafted to bring about the voluntary surrender of homeschool freedoms.

There are so many ways to supplement a homeschool program without enrolling in a public school. Support group activities, co-ops, tutoring by other parents, computer programs and internet help are just a few. You are limited only by your imagination. Homeschool parents can successfully educate their children without enrollment in a public school. The law in Colorado allows for homeschooled students to participate in extracurricular or interscholastic activities in a public school or in a private school if possible. These types of activities do not require enrollment in a public school but one must always exert caution when involved with a public school. I have received numerous calls from parents whose children participate in such programs and the public school is requiring more than what the law allows. Parents must know their rights and not succumb to intrusive demands by public schools. There are definite dangers in this option even though it is included in the law. This option was not pursued directly by the homeschooling leadership in the state or HSLDA. It showed up as a bill one session by a legislator who had been approached by a family or two in his district who wanted to participate in district sports programs. It was passed into law and since then amended where families are to be allowed to participate on an equal basis but can be charged up to 150% of the required fees. Not so equal in my opinion. There have been conflicts over proving GPA’s and other eligibility requirements. I believe the most inherent danger is the slippery slope of homeschool families being hardened slowly to the reasons why they chose homeschooling in the first place. I have seen the analogy of the frogs happily in the pot who do not notice the water gradually heating up and eventually becoming the source of their demise played out in several homeschool families. I have personally witnessed children who were no longer content at home due to the pull of “socialization” and parents who gave in to a system that said it could do a better job educating their children. It all began with participation in extracurricular or interscholastic activities. Parents who choose this road must be on their guard at all times. I sometimes wonder if there was an ulterior motive by some who voted to pass this legislation. This at times appears to be another strike against homeschool freedoms.

I am not writing this article to condemn or to cause guilt. I am just so very alarmed at what I am seeing. Twenty years ago I never dreamed I would see this particular threat to homeschooling – and to witness so many families embracing it. Homeschool parents today do not know what it was like to homeschool under the threat of court and even jail. They do not know what it was like to have truancy officers knock on your door late at night with threats and intimidation. Or to have social services threaten to remove your children from your home because you homeschooled. They do not know what it was like to dot every “I” and cross every “T” and still have your application to homeschool rejected by your school district. They do not know of the fear instilled in the hearts of families who had to make and practice escape plans in case they were needed. However, if current trends persist and the lines are persistently blurred between independent homeschools, dual enrollment programs, charter school home programs, virtual public schools and public school “cottage schools” - these very things could come once again.

With the stroke of a pen, homeschooling can forever be changed. What would make that day even sadder is to realize those freedoms weren’t taken away by force but were given away. Remember that freedom is never free. It was the courage of many families that brought about homeschool freedom in Colorado. I pray that we have the courage to maintain those freedoms and to not give up any hard won ground.

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