Right to Life's bill aims to pressure politicians

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Most recent compelling evidence is House Bill 4655, adopted late last year in the House of Representative's rush to go home for Christmas. The bill would give priority to get \$1.8 million in federal family planning grants to organizations that don't provide abortions or referrals for abortions or referrals for abortions and conting the legality or accessibility of elective abortion."

The bill now goes to the Senator, where passage is likely accessibility of elective abortion."

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enthood, a respected not-for-profit organization that provides family planning services to more than 60,000 women across the state. These ser-

that provides family planning services to more than 60,000 women across the state. These services include gyn exams, cancer screening, birth control devices and information, pregnancy testing and counseling, treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, HIV testing and counseling, and remained health care for mother and child. For many of these women, often poor, these services are simply unavailable anywhere else.

Planned Parenthood does provide abortion at three out of 31 clinic sites. But repeated Michigan Department of Community Health audits have shown that Planned Parenthood has never used any public funds to support or advocate for abortion services in any way.

The stated purpose of the bill is to stimulate community-based and faith-based organizations (other than Planned Parenthood, of course) to provide these various services. But in getting started up, these organizations will face all kinds of existing federal and government regulatory requirements, which guarantees delays in providing these services to patients. Moreover, when these organizations do get going, they will be required by the regulations to provide exactly the same kinds of services that Planned Parenthood is already providing.

Other than continuing Right to Life's vendetta against Planned Parenthood, the bill makes no sense on its face.

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Some legislators are clear about this. Republican Sen. John (Joe) Schwarz (R-Battle Creek), the only practicing physician in the Senate: "All

nton/Plymouth

this bill does is take money away from an organization with a provon track record of providing health services to law income people who can't get health care anywhere else. For those who oppose abortion, Rep. Pan Godchaux (R-Birmingham) argues that the bill would likely increase the number of abortions by leaving some women currently served by Planned Parenthood without pregnancy prevention counselling.

So how come RTL is pushing this legislation just new? Simple. A ton of folks will be running for the legislature this fall, and most of them would kill for Right to Life's support in a primary election.

The stated purpose of the bill is to stimulate "community-based and faith-based" organizations (other than Planned Parenthood, of course) to provide these services (gyn exams, cancer screening, birth control devices and information, pregnancy testing and counseling, treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, HIV testing and counseling and prenatal health care for mother and child.)

Here's how the polities work. Term limits will eliminate nearly 50 sitting legislators, mostly Senators, at the end of this year. And a bunch of new districts were created by reapportionment. Result is a whole posse of current House members who want to move up by running for the Senate, it all adds up to an unprecedented opportunity for Right to Life to get leverage on ambitious candidates and extert support for this mean-spirited and dangerous legislation.

Sen. Schwarz, who is running an uphill battle for the GOP gubernatorial nomination, makes the case clearly: This legislation files in the face of existing law that says abortion is legal in the United States. Abortion should be available, safe and care.

United States. Abortion should be available, suc-and rare.

The bill has been referred to the Family, Men-tal Health and Human Services Committee in the Senate, where the odds are that it will be approved for a vote in the full Senate. If passed there, it's up to Gov. John Engler, who has demonstrated over the years a pronounced reluc-tance to roll over for anybody. He should veto the bill, thereby striking a blow for common sense and against single-issue vendettas.

Phil Power is chairman of Communica-tions Network Inc., the company that owns this newspaper. He welcomes your com-ments, cither by voice mail at (734) 953-2047, Ext. 1880, or by e-mail at prower@ homecomm.net.



Controversial books teach students to think

The controversy that has
always swirled
around Mark
Twain's Huckleberry Finn presents us with one

sents us with one of the strongest strongest. Twain is the subject of Ken Burns' new public television documentary that ran Monday and Tuesday on local PBS stations. Burns, an Ann Arbor native, has a deep love for Americana and those subjects that touch most deeply on the American experience – the Civil War, baseball, jazz, the Brooklyn Bridge and Teddy Roosevelt. Twain is a pivotal figure in defining what it means to be an American.

Ernest Hemingway said of Twain that all American literature begins with Huckfeberry Finn. Twain's mosterpiece used the vernacular language of blacks and whites along the Mississippi River to tell a story that combined boy's adventure with an epic journey and the first and a stunningly complex exploration of America's racial divide.

Since its earliest days, it has been the center of

racial divide.

Since its earliest days, it has been the center of controversy. First schools and libraries banned it because of its coarse language. Twain had written the much tamer Tom Sauper years before and the sequel was expected to be another "boys book".

book."
But Twain had other things on his mind when he wrote Huck Finn. He wrote the book in Huck's language, from Huck's point of view and that made all the difference. Here was a poorly educated, uncouth kid. He is abused by an alcoholic, wastref father and unable to adjust to "civilized society" when he's taken in by good meaning Christian women. He sets out for the river and, fatefully, takes with him his guardian's slave Jim.

In recent years, the book has been attacked as In recent years, the book has been attacked as racist. It is perhaps the most obnoxious, foolish misintorpretation of any book in history. Rather than being banned as racist, the book should be, and quite rightly is by many, celebrated as the first book to attempt an honest understanding of our racial problems. But many fine teachers locally have been called on the carpet for teaching this literary masterpieco.

Huck is a product of his environment. He's a redneck, full of superstitions and confused ideas about morality. To Huck, Jim is property and stealing away with him is a sin. Through the course of the book, the reader and Huck begin to see Jim as a sensitive, wise and deeply roated

e Jim as a sensitive, wise and deeply rooted

The use of the "n-word" was part of that ver-nacular of the times and far less offensive than its use in numerous rap songs by black perform-ers. Huck adopts the dismissive language of his deeply Christian community and in time learns better.

better.

A scene near the end of the book has been fairly criticized for making Jim the butt of a joke. The scene itself is the kind of burleaque that Twain did so well. But even here, there might be another point being made. Jim's humiliation is really the idea of Tom Sawyer and talkes place as Huck and Jim return to "civilization" and Huck comes under his old friend's influence.

Rather than being banned, Huck Finn should be taught. It should be the one essential book in every middle and junior high school in the country.

be tought, it assues to the country.

Our schools are always walking a fine line when choosing appropriate materials for the classroom and the library. In recent years, some school districts have opted to keep the Harry Potterbooks from the curriculum because of complaints that the book's occult topics are "anti-Christian." Schools usually have chosen to keep the books in their libraries.

Whether on to J.K. Rowling, author of the Potter books, is Christian, the books are not "anti-Christian" any more that the books about wizards and fantasy lands by J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. Tolkien and Lewis were devout Christians who borrowed from the same wealth of legend and lore daing back to the days of the Druids to tell stories that drew parallels with the story of Christian redemption. The Harry Potter books, too, are about a struggle between good and evil.

wil.

The Potter books are not as richly complex as Tolkien or as elegantly written as Lewis but they are engrossing stories that relate directly to young people and have opened the pleasures of reading to many who had been spending their time playing video games.

School is the right place to discuss the themes, style and even the various myths that have inspired so much of our literature. Middle and junior high school is the right time and place to open the door to discussion not to cut it off. Schools need to challenge thinking not mollify prejudice.

prejudice.

It is also the right time to introduce children to

It is also the right time to introduce children to Mark Twain, America's greatest writer, funniest humorist and most insightful social critic.

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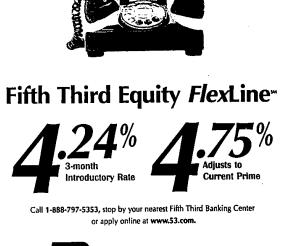
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