



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

May 6th, 2019

To: Chief Clerk Sekerak

Re: Vote Explanation for HB 3063

For much of my adult life I wore a uniform in defense of our ideals and idealism. As a public servant in elected as well as unelected roles, and as a teacher to young adults for the past two decades – I have struggled with finding the balance between our self-evident rights to both life as well as liberty – I believe this tension is at the heart of what makes our country distinct among all others. It is an irreconcilable conflict: it is a balance that cannot, that will not, exist. It is a balance we are nevertheless duty-bound to seek to build, knowing that a more perfect Union will never become A Perfect Union.

Few measures have tugged at my conscience as much as House Bill 3063. The science is absolutely clear: vaccines save lives, vaccines prevent contagion with very little relative demonstrated consequences to those who receive them. And yet, we must recognize that the state abandoning exemptions from compliance for religious and/or philosophical beliefs – is no small thing. While I believe that all involved in the health care landscape seek to help, this measure puts significant authority in the hands of local health “experts.” While the most recent amendments clarify greater authority for the healthcare provider of the child, and restrains the authority of the State of Oregon to question case exemptions made by providers, it remains an imperfect compact. We must recognize the hard work of all who improved the measure: unfortunately, the divide remains a little too far for my support today.

The heartfelt anxiety of parents communicated with us over these past months warrants our attention: their passionate advocacy for what they believe – for their children – must be recognized as well as respected. Even though some of the tactics used in attempts to thwart this bill were (and remain) deplorable, I believe these isolated acts should be understood in context of the emotions involved and do not reflect the views of the many. And while we may disagree over the urgency of the problem addressed or even the best solution to remedy the problem, we must all agree on the fundamental impact of this measure upon the nature of family decision-making on matters of healthcare. I ask us all to pause and consider for a moment the precedent set today: that government may impose a required medical procedure (or perhaps in another instance, the absence of a medical procedure) to private or public schools because of the accepted “truth” of its necessity for the safety and security of the community as a whole.

For good or ill, reality demands at least a marginal surrender of certain liberties when an individual chooses to live within a community. We all make adjustments, and rightly so, to join a group. However, the force of law regarding medical interventions because of community benefit – must never be taken too lightly – ever. We must remain vigilant: on guard against tolerating intolerance in the name of community, or science. While there may be many parents currently choosing medical exemptions because of a lack of knowledge, or even acceptance of “alternative facts” with regard to vaccination consequences, the principle at issue today is the limits on religious and/or philosophical values.

When passed, as I suspect House Bill 3063 shall be, we are effectively putting the full force, power, and weight of the state squarely behind the requirement – requirement – of all who earnestly believe such an action is contradictory to the nature and/or will of God (as they know God to be), must accept medicine as a preventative action – or forfeit the right to a public education in schools paid for through taxes assessed on those who may hold those very same beliefs. For a few, this will quite literally be the subsidization of activities found to be against their entire framework of religious expression. It is upon this issue that I find myself stuck. Imagine what could or would result should this action become too easy, too justified for a greater accepted community benefit.

History is replete with societies that traded one form of knowing the world with another: of nations determining the rights of individual expression were less important than community benefit. And, even though this measure is rational, reasonable, and responsible policy – it is simultaneously moving us toward a place where all beliefs are equal, but some beliefs are deemed to be “more equal.” I believe this is treacherous ground for our people and place. In the end, our duties are to provide the security of the many, even at the cost of the few, or the one. It is my fervent hope that all who are newly empowered through this law – recognize the need for caution, and guard against overreach, along this path.

It is our duty to serve the greatest good with the best information we have available. Sometimes the few must accept limitations upon absolute expression of liberties when the many require it: especially when lives hang in the balance. This is an insufficient policy for an impossible circumstance, it is a compromise that shall likely yield moderately more good than harm, but at what cost? This is the question that warrants our answer before supporting the bill as it appears before us today.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Evans', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Representative Paul Evans
State Representative – Oregon House District 20