

February 11, 2009

Dr. John C. Cavanaugh, Chancellor
Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education
Dixon University center
2986 North Second Street
Harrisburg, PA 17110

Dear Dr. Cavanaugh:

We are writing to express our sincere displeasure at the decision of Millersville University to invite William Ayers, a University of Chicago professor and former 1960s radical, to give the college's annual Anna Funk Lockey Educational Lecture on March 19. The decision to host Mr. Ayers — under the guise of his work in urban education — is an inappropriate promotion of a man whose history includes violence against the United States of America.

In the mid-1960s, in reaction to the Vietnam War, Bill Ayers founded an organization called the Weather Underground. In addition to other activities, Mr. Ayers and his associates bombed the Pentagon and set off bombs at other government buildings. He has never publicly apologized for these activities.

Since that time, his "urban education" agenda includes advocating an education philosophy which promotes student and parental political activism instead of achievement testing. His works, including "City Kids, City Teachers," "Teaching the Personal and the Political" and "Teaching Toward Freedom" highlight his outspoken belief that education should ... "teach against oppression, against America's history of evil and racism, thereby forcing social transformation." (Wall Street Journal, 9/23/09).

As the founder of the "small schools" movement, which includes building individual schools around specific political themes, Mr. Ayers has heavily pushed students to "confront issues of inequity, war and violence." He openly expresses his support to have teacher education programs serve as "sites of resistance."

The decision by Millersville University to invite such an individual to our community is patently offensive and sends an incredibly insensitive and repugnant message to the men and women of our armed forces as well as other law abiding citizens. Since the beginning of the year, he has been denied entrance to Canada and other previously scheduled appearances have been canceled. Millersville should do the same.

It is simply not acceptable that a taxpayer owner and operated institution of higher learning would invite a man who engaged in domestic terrorism to its campus. Regardless of any perceived educational benefit, this was done in extraordinary poor taste. Mr. Ayers is no different than another outspoken individual who argued that his bombings were an extreme but necessary action to attract attention to the erosion of human freedom, Dr. Theodore Kaczynski, who is more commonly known as the "Unibomber" (sic). To argue otherwise is intellectually dishonest.

According to an article that appeared in the Lancaster Intelligencer Journal (2/11/09), Janet Kacskos, Millersville's director of communications said that, "The college is revamping its urban education program, and his [Mr. Ayers'] work in Chicago will fit very nicely with where we want our program to go." She further says that, "The lecture is being paid for with private endowment money," and that, "No taxpayer money is being used." We disagree on both points.

Mr. Ayers' work on urban education has significant radical components. If that is the direction that Millersville University believes it should go, then we believe a full curriculum review is necessary. Further, without the publicly funded and operated institution of the university, there would be no private endowments or foundation funding.

We look forward to your prompt reply regarding this very important issue and trust that you will give us greater insight into why Millersville University believed that this was appropriate. Further, we are interested to receive your input into how we can defend the Commonwealth's significant investment of taxpayer monies toward the State System of Higher Education in light of this issue.

Sincerely,

Scott W. Boyd
John Bear
Bryan Cutler
David Hickernell
Katie True
Tom Creighton
Gordon Denlinger

cc: Francine McNairy, President
Millersville University
Senator Mike Brubaker
Senator Lloyd Smucker