



## Naperville book store holds panel on freedom of speech

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Several hundred people packed Anderson's Bookshop in Naperville Monday for a forum on freedom of speech sparked by the cancellation of local appearances by controversial author Bill Ayers.

Almost all who voiced their opinion were in agreement that Ayers should have been allowed to speak.

Ayers, an education professor at University of Illinois at Chicago, gained notoriety in the 1960s and 70s when he co-founded the Weather Underground, an anti-Vietnam war group responsible for a series of bombings at public buildings. Ayers had faded from the spotlight until his ties to President Barack Obama were called into question during the campaign.

Ayers was scheduled to speak April 8 at both Naperville North High School and Anderson's. However, when the community learned of his planned appearances, some residents flooded Naperville Unit District 203 and Anderson's with angry phone calls and e-mails - prompting both to cancel their events. Bookshop co-owner Becky Anderson said the response from some was so vicious her employees feared for their safety.

Ayers' critics say he is a terrorist. In interviews with the Daily Herald, Ayers has said that is an inaccurate portrayal and he has never hurt or killed anyone.

Anderson said she wanted Monday's forum on free speech to be a chance for civil discourse. The event included both a panel discussion and opportunity for public input.

Many spoke out against those who used intimidation to prompt the cancellations and said Ayers should have been allowed to speak.

"I don't care whether it's the neo-Nazis or Bill Ayers or Obama or whoever," said Raye Isenberg. "Everyone has the right to invite whomever they want. ... This is a public school education. We're paying for our students to be educated and that's being infringed upon."

Naperville North junior V.K. Moktan said he believes his classmates have the intelligence to understand Ayers and make their own decisions about him.

"I do not support Bill Ayers, (or) what he did in the past, and I wanted to go and personally debate with him what he did in the past and I was amazed they canceled this," he said.

Some also called for Ayers to be given another invitation to speak in Naperville. Anderson has told the Daily Herald she would like to do so.

Ken Orth of Naperville, a Vietnam veteran, was one of the few in the audience who said Ayers should not be allowed to speak in Naperville. He said he does not support those who threatened Anderson's, but believes inviting Ayers condones his work.

"In my view, he's using his professor platform to teach the so-called social justice program to teachers," Orth said. "If you understand what his concept of social justice is, it's anti-Americanism, anti-capitalism."

Gary Bolt, deputy chief of police, said he supports free speech but believes both District 203 and Anderson's had tough decisions to make and had safety in mind.

"Do we expose ourselves to potential danger?" he asked. "If something had happened, what would this crowd now

be saying to (Superintendent Alan) Dr. Leis?"