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Ohio House of Representatives
Primary and Secondary Education Committee
Proponent Testimony – House Bill 748
William J. Bennett

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Chair Manning, Vice-Chair Bird, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, I write in support of Representative Bird's recently introduced legislation, House Bill 748, and to let you know how important I think it is for legislators in Ohio and across the nation to get this issue right. Ever since I served as Ronald Reagan's secretary of education I have remained interested in the proper education of our students, especially in the areas of civics and history – so critical for an informed citizenry.

I have attached a *Fox News* op-ed I wrote earlier this year on this topic that the committee may find useful, and supports the approach that Representative Bird is following with his well-thought piece of legislation. In my op-ed, I wrote about how I believed Governor Youngkin provided solid guidance and leadership in this area in his first Executive Order as Governor. I encouraged conservative lawmakers across the nation to look at Governor Youngkin's approach and hopefully learn from them. At the time of its publication, I was (and remain) concerned that some approaches to this issue could have significant unintended consequences.

I believe it is of critical importance to the future of our nation to be sure our students learn all of our history in an age-appropriate manner. It is also important that parents work with educators to help their children develop the independent thinking skills they need for a bright future. If we provide children with such a public education, doing so we will help take politics out of education and prepare our students for the real world. **The vast majority of Americans are against indoctrination** – or as House Bill 748 states it – advocating by compelling certain political or other beliefs, and **are supportive of candid instruction and thoughtful, age-appropriate discussion and debate.**

House Bill 748 is consistent with these important ideas. Critically, it contains a clear and understandable articulation of the standards people of any political persuasion should expect from our schools and teachers. The bill accomplishes this not by *removing* local school district control, but by **enhancing local school districts' authority** in establishing professional conduct standards. A strong public education system that provides children with these skills will help our nation excel.

I encourage the Ohio legislature to seriously consider the approach in House Bill 748 to this important issue.

Sincerely,



William J. Bennett



[Virginia Gov. Youngkin's smart, conservative education policy is a blueprint for America](#)

Critical race theory was a flashpoint in Virginia, as it has been across much of the country

By William J. Bennett | January 19, 2022

After taking the oath of office last week, Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin made good on his campaign promise by issuing an executive order banning critical race theory in the state's schools. The governor's various orders have drawn some criticism, but before rushing to judge the order, consider how we got to this point both in Virginia and across the country.

Youngkin was elected in November, in part, because he pledged to bring common sense pragmatism to the state. He said there should be no room for intolerance or discrimination in our classrooms or the public discourse.

That message help carry large swaths of independent and moderate voters, notably suburban moms, tipping the scales in a close election.

Legislation is an important tool to stamp out intolerance in our schools. Even more decisive, however, is the culture in our classrooms.

When a teacher expresses a partisan attitude or conveys partiality, something as little as an off-hand comment – "Your White privilege is showing," or "I would expect that answer from someone like you" – can discourage students from forming independent thought. But, of course, you cannot legislate all behavior. Those changes start with school leaders, parents and teachers who together set the ethos of a school.

Critical race theory was a flashpoint in Virginia, as it has been across much of the country. This school of thought and the phrase has become the poster child of a decades-long trend of curricula and textbooks that obsess over America's failings and steer away from its exceptionalism.

Yet, for all the hullabaloo, critical race theory itself remains widely misunderstood, which has produced a great deal of knee-jerk policymaking. Liberals have argued that critical race theory is not taught in classrooms, and for the most part that's true.

It happens to be a legal theory advocated most fervently by extremist professors. However, examples from Virginia's Loudoun County and other school districts, where "anti-racism" doctrines have been incorporated into teacher training and lesson plans, lay bare the dangers of poor-quality programs, implemented badly, that draw from the tenets of critical race theory.

Such programs create destructive and divisive heat while offering no light – things that should have no place in our schools. In response, many Republican-controlled state houses have or are rushing to pass legislation meant to protect students from such practices and restore a more objective, honest recounting of the United States' history – the whole and true story.

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Such programs create destructive and divisive heat while offering no light – things that should have no place in our schools. In response, many Republican-controlled state houses have or are rushing to pass legislation meant to protect students from such practices and restore a more objective, honest recounting of the United States' history – the whole and true story.

By and large, these laws are not needed.

In Montana and Arkansas, for example, the state attorneys general investigated critical race theory and found that if it, or any other such ideology, were actually being forced on students, that would violate the long-standing application of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 – a conclusion that Youngkin's executive order reinforces and builds upon.

What's more, local school boards, educators and parents should be the conservators of our classrooms, not politicians in Washington or the state Capitol.

By contrast, Youngkin's executive order takes an approach that brings us closer to true conservative values in three ways:

First, it affirms that encouraging any form of racial discrimination in our schools – by any name or title – has been unlawful since the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Second, it empowers parents with better transparency into instructional materials.

Third, it acknowledges that we must equip teachers with professional development resources so they can better prepare students to evaluate, analyze and think critically on difficult or controversial topics; to question and verify the credibility of sources; and to make informed judgments – all without imposing the teacher's personal beliefs. All the while recognizing that most of what is taught in schools is noncontroversial.

Youngkin's executive order incorporates key elements of a conservative approach to these important issues. Incorporated wisely, conservative principles will prove a winning formula to provide high-quality education to our young people, for it is they who will write the next chapter of our nation, which remains the world's last best hope.

Youngkin is now the steward of Virginia's future. May his tenure help move us all toward sensible, principled conservative education policy.

William J. Bennett is the former secretary of education and director of the National Office of Drug Control Policy.
