

## **Robert Maranto**

Written Testimony on Ohio [HB 103: Establish Ohio Social Studies Standards Task Force](#) by Dr. Robert Maranto, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Chair in Leadership, Department of Education Reform, University of Arkansas, May 9, 2023.

### TESTIMONY

With others, I have published 16 books and roughly 100 scholarly articles on the presidency, public school bureaucracy, and education reform, which have been cited over 2,900 times. More to the point here, I have done fieldwork in over 200 public schools, and served on my local elected school board, and the appointed board governing a nonprofit charter school in Pennsylvania.

My grandparents came from Sicily, a place where few trust government, and the rule of law is tenuous, enabling rule by the strongest. That explains why for 150 years Sicily's chief export has been its most able and ambitious people, like my grandparents.

With Sicily as a comparison, my family has always valued the U.S. Founders' legacy, a wonderful Constitution ensuring limited government, free speech, religious freedom, economic freedom, and the ability to influence government. These freedoms have been quite rare in human history and make the U.S. special. Before I was born my father and two of his brothers fought against Germany and Italy to protect our freedoms. One of my father's brothers died in the Normandy invasion.

My father knew that as President Reagan put it, "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction."

As someone who spends a lot of time in schools, I can tell you that we no longer do a good job teaching about the freedoms the Founders gave us. A reminder of that came just last week when the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Commissioner Peggy Carr released the results for the 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) History exams. Often called the nation's report card, NAEP exams allow us to make statistically accurate comparisons across time of how much our kids learn.

These results were horrible. Only 13% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders scored proficient in History, even lower than the mediocre percentage for reading (31%) and math (26%) (<https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/highlights/ushistory/2022/>).

Further, unlike the NAEP declines in math and reading, historical knowledge began dropping at least four years *before* COVID-19 disrupted schooling.

As Commissioner Carr noted, to put this failure in perspective, 40% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders (up from 34% in 2018) cannot understand simple concepts expressed in historical documents, such as that Lincoln's Gettysburg Address commemorated U.S. soldiers who died for our nation in the Civil War.

If we do not teach young people about the importance and fragility of American freedoms, we will lose those freedoms. That's already happening. Increasingly we see not just peaceful

protests, which are vital, lawful tools for Americans to influence their government, but violent disruption of government. We also see bullying of our fellow citizens, eviscerating free speech in the name of safety and equity. As a result, as pointed out in the forthcoming book *The Free Inquiry Papers*, four in ten Americans now engage in self-censorship---three times as many as at the height of the McCarthy era [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3647099](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3647099).

Thomas Jefferson and other founders advocated widespread education chiefly to safeguard the republic: they must be turning in their graves.

For all these reasons I am delighted to see the state of Ohio establish a task force to develop standards for social studies, to see that this decline does not continue. If those freedoms which make the U.S. unique are to endure, this must be the first of many state level efforts.

This American offers his full support.