

Ohio Senate Education Committee
February 14, 2023
Senate Bill 17

Chairman Brenner, Vice-Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding Senate Bill (S.B.) 17. My name is Kyle Garrett; I come from Union County.

I am both pleased and concerned that S.B. 17 has been introduced.

I am pleased, because I believe it is imperative that the principles of freedom—in this case, the principles of financial and economic freedom—be taught in Ohio schools. Financial literacy, as Senator Steve Wilson described in his sponsor testimony, is very important for students to learn. But even more important is instilling the values that result in a free society.

Opponents might say that schools exist to prepare students to be contributing members of society, not necessarily to promote a certain political ideology. But that claim is only half true. Education, at its heart, is the instilling of values, namely of morality. Benjamin Franklin is credited for saying that only a virtuous people is capable of freedom, and that an immoral society loses its freedom if it wants to survive long term. I agree that schools must not fail to prepare students for the workforce. But if education ignores teaching the values which ensure freedom, then a society cannot be free for long. By teaching students about the workings and history of capitalism, students would be taught those virtues Franklin and the other Founding Fathers spoke on, such as hard work, generosity, general selflessness, persistence, patience, respect, and independence.

Furthermore, it is expected that those who would oppose the teaching of capitalism as described in the bill are generally opposed to capitalism itself. For them, it would be better to stop this bill and leave out language on teaching about certain economic systems all together. That way, they can teach whatever they want about capitalism, endangering the very system which has brought unprecedented prosperity and opportunity to the world and Ohio. So, by opposing S.B. 17, they contradict themselves by implying that they be allowed to teach their economically and politically oppressive ideology in schools. It is a scientific fact: nature abhors a vacuum.

However, I find myself equally concerned about S.B. 17. Yes, it is good that freedom—in this case, the freedom which comes from capitalism—is promoted in schools. But can we be sure that capitalism will be taught so that students will cherish it?

Once upon a time, there was no need for a bill like S.B. 17, because virtue, as described above by Franklin, generally reigned supreme in Ohio. Educators would instill the values of freedom in students, and, ideally, those students would learn to love freedom and the things which keep them free. Now, except for some bright spots, virtue has been replaced with entitlement and general intolerance, among many other oppressive values. As a result, we see opposition to freedom and the virtues which undergird it. For example, during the pandemic, the Governor issued mandates that compromised the people's freedom for the sake of public safety, as the official narrative assured us. In a society where virtue is king and freedom is

cherished, such an action would be vehemently opposed and the Governor would be impeached and, after a fair trial, removed from office.

But virtue is not the influencing cultural force anymore in Ohio, and, therefore, freedom is not valued—let alone guarded—as it should be. How, then, can freedom exist in an immoral society? We cannot demand people to teach what goes against their sincerely held beliefs, for that would make the free man an oppressor. But we cannot let schools neglect teaching capitalism either; otherwise, the void will be filled by teaching communism—or something of that ilk. Like I said earlier, nature abhors a vacuum.

So, could we add language to the bill that would allow local school boards to decide for themselves whether to teach capitalism? In this way, we could ensure that the values of each school district would be protected, and people would be allowed to teach according to their sincerely held beliefs.

In short, I hesitantly support S.B. 17, because I appreciate the bill's goal. But I wonder about bill's practical application if it becomes law. If you oppose the bill, what should be done to ensure the maintenance of freedom and the values which guarantee our freedom, as described above by Benjamin Franklin?

If you support the bill, ask yourself:

Can this bill accomplish the goal—both the one explicitly made by Senator Wilson and the implicit one he seems to have—without turning freedom-lovers into overlords?