

Opposition Testimony on Senate Bill 83
Prof. Scot Kaplan
Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair
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Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for providing me this opportunity to speak in opposition to SB 83, and for allowing me to include my son in these hearings. I think that we can all agree that what we are speaking about here today is for and about Ohio's young people and their best interests.

My name is Scot Kaplan, and I teach in the Department of Art at The Ohio State University, Marion. I have been working in education for nearly 30 years, having taught or lectured at universities in the US and abroad, including Ohio Northern and Ohio University. I have taught across the academic spectrum from community college to the Ivy League, and from major metropolitan areas like NYC to Marion County, where I now work. I have worked extensively outside of academia as well, in construction and various forms of design. The breadth and scope of my work and educational experience I feel is significant to today's hearing. Issues like this tend to be positioned as oppositional between those in the ivory tower and those that swing a hammer, and having uniquely experienced both, I can attest that my opposition to the bill derives from both.

What is being presented in SB83 is not new, and in fact it follows closely to a bill proposed by Marion County's Senator Mumper nearly 20 years ago (SB 24, 2005). I think that one might reasonably ask: during this span of time, hundreds of thousands of students have graduated from Ohio universities, and if the issue is of the significance that you claim, where is the evidence? Why did they not testify in support of the bill, expressing their troublesome experiences?

That absence of evidence makes clear that campuses are not spaces of the suppression of free thought and inculcation of liberal doctrine that is suggested in SB 83. Let me provide a specific firsthand case, which I feel confident could be repeated by almost any of my colleagues.

Several years ago I had a student named Steven who had lived his whole life in Marion County. He was taking a course that was called Concepts and Issues in Contemporary Art, and as you can imagine we were looking at a painting by Jackson Pollack. "Is this Art?" I asked the class, and then asked Steven directly: "Why is this Art?" "Well," he said, "It is Art because I have always been told it is Art." "I didn't ask you what you've been told, I asked you what you think," I said. A big, curious smile came across his face, and he said, "I have never really been asked what I thought before, I am not quite sure". After that Steven was an eager vocal participant in

class in a way that seemed new to him from his K-12 experience, and followed through other courses that Steven took with me throughout the year.

At the conclusion of every year OSU Marion holds an academic recognition program and at the conclusion of the event, I was approached by Steven's parents, who wanted to thank me. They explained, "our son holds some different views from his peers and even from some of us in his family, and his isolation was really starting to be worrying to us. But since he started taking your classes there has been a big change, he is more confident and happier and he feels encouraged by school. He told us about when you asked him for his thoughts about Art and that made him feel like he was important which was not the feeling he was getting from his community."

The supposition that liberals are crushing broad, inclusive, thought and conversation simply runs counter to the nature of the investigative process in research and pedagogy. It is simply not what we do. How many Stevens are out there searching for challenging concepts that may be distinct from those embraced by their own communities, and where can they find them?

There are several conservative mantras that this bill runs counter to: "keep intrusive and over-reaching government out of our lives" and "school choice." Where college already provides broad freedom of choice in models and means and priorities, this bill seeks to eliminate them and replace them with government mandates and prohibitions. It seems to suggest that the Pontifical Josephinum and Columbus College of Art and Design should be sharing curriculum and broad operational policies, including that the only Catholic Pontifical college in North America should not show religious preferences?

By way of another biography I would like to introduce Oxford Kaplan, age 8, Columbus city native and public school attendee and my son. If we are doing anything here today we are trying to create the best future for him. I can tell you that my son is not best served by being shielded from "controversial" or "of the day" subject matter, in fact it keeps him competitive with the world.

My son and those from all across the state of Ohio can engage challenging ideas and choose independently which to embrace and which to deny, just as you the members of this committee have done through their college journey and under the conditions that currently exist within the broad landscape of higher education in Ohio.

My colleagues here today have all received their credentials and their position through the broad creation of new knowledge. This new knowledge challenges the old (a flat earth becomes a sphere, a geo-centered solar system becomes a helio-centered one, all life is made of more than simple proteins, etc.). New knowledge advances or replaces the research that preceded it. It is exactly the information that our students must be exposed to for them to remain competent and relevant in an increasingly competitive world. We need not revisit Flat Earth

thinking, and mandating equal time for it as SB 83 requires does a disservice to research and educational advancements and ill serves our students.

It seems curious that the stated justification for prohibiting unionized faculty from striking is the suggestion that the students are not receiving the services and information that they have paid for by way of missing instructional time. However, mandating that students, who have no credential or recognized expertise in a class subject, be mandated equal classroom time in espousing conjecture is not viewed as a waste of class time?

We should clearly recognize the value of the rigorous study and generous instruction engaged by my colleagues and what it has created for the people and the State of Ohio: the employment that it has enabled, the dollars that it has generated and the lives that it has enhanced. I caution against capricious measures like those mandated in SB 83, which would fundamentally alter the proven pedagogical structures that have produced these outcomes. I urge you to oppose SB 83. Thank you very much for your time and consideration, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.