

Proponent Testimony for H.B. No. 486
Education Committee
Monday, November 3, 2025
Mr. Ivory L. Kennedy Jr., M.Ed.

Chair Fowler Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Brennan, and Members of the Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide Proponent testimony on House Bill 486, the “Charlie Kirk American Heritage Act.”

I appear before you today as a proponent of the truth being taught. Not this bill in totality but for the simple fact that an accurate and historical account of **all** American history is imperative to reducing ignorance of American history, hate, and violence within our society.

Representative Dovilla said, “This is not about rewriting history; it’s about restoring honesty and depth to the way we teach it.” I could not agree more. If honesty and depth are the goals of this legislation, then my presence here today is to ensure that we honor those words in both spirit and substance.

Patriotism, at its truest form, is not blind allegiance. It is the courage to love this country enough to confront its truth, the good, the bad, and the downright reprehensible. Patriotism is not the suppression of uncomfortable lessons; it is the strength to face them so that we do not repeat them.

Representative Dovilla also said, “Civic education, done well, forms citizens who understand why our freedoms endure only when anchored in moral conviction.”

That conviction begins with truth. And truth requires us to remember that the “cornerstone” of the Confederacy, as declared in 1861 by Vice President Alexander H. Stephens, was the belief that the Negro was not equal to the white man, and that slavery was his natural condition.

After the Civil War, many of those same leaders were pardoned by President Andrew Johnson and restored to government positions, positions of power in the very system they had sought to destroy. What followed was not justice but consequence: the rise of the Black Codes, the emergence of sharecropping, and the foundation of Jim Crow laws that would shape American life for nearly a century.

This is not about dwelling on guilt or shame; it is about understanding that when history is left incomplete, injustice becomes policy.

I come from a line of people who believed in this nation even when it did not yet believe in them. My grandmother was born in Lowndes County, Alabama, between Montgomery and Selma, in the heart of the civil rights movement.

She was a woman of faith and conviction who believed, above all else, in education. She would share that she believed that education was the way.

When Barack Obama was inaugurated as the 44th President of the United States, she said, "That is what education can do for any race in this country."

That belief shaped my life. It is why I teach. It is why I stand here today. Education is the most American promise there is, that through learning, each generation can move this nation closer to its ideals.

In 1965, a patriot by the name of 17-year-old named Charles Mauldin walked across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, demanding the right to vote. He was beaten for it.

So I ask this committee the same question he embodied that day:
Why did he have to march for something that should have already been his?

That question is the essence of civic education. It is why we teach history, not to divide, but to reveal how the rights we enjoy today were fought for by those who refused to give up on America.

When we erase or soften those realities, we erase the courage that made democracy possible.

The Daughters of the Confederacy rewrote history to portray bondage as benevolence and treason as tradition. They published textbooks used by generations of American children, teaching that the Civil War was about "states' rights" rather than slavery.

That is what real rewriting of history looks like. And it continues today, through those who seek to ban the teaching of a full American story under the guise of "protecting children" or "preserving heritage."

Modern efforts have turned patriotism into performance rather than a love for the whole country.

Two weeks ago, Representative Click referred to Charlie Kirk as "a great American patriot." But I ask again, patriot of a country or ideology? To those who prefer a narrative that fits rather than one that is factual?

Members of this committee, the greatest form of patriotism is not denial, it is accountability. It is loving this country enough to see it clearly, even when that clarity is uncomfortable.

Patriotism is not about protecting comfort. It is about protecting truth. It is about building a future where every child, regardless of race or background, can learn the entire story of this nation and still believe in its promise.

I am not here to condemn America. I am here because I believe in her. Because I believe education can build a stronger, freer, and more honest nation. And because I know and believe America can be better than this.

Thank you, Madam Chair and Members of the Committee.

In the depths of the Great Depression, 10-year-old John Long quit school and began picking cotton to help his family survive on a plantation outside Selma, Ala.

The working day was sunup to sundown. The pay? Just 50 cents.

"I remember one day it was real hot and sweaty, and the work was going on and on," said Long, now 82 and living in Springfield. "There was an old lady working the fields, must have been in her 80s. I said to her, 'This is rough. How long do I have to put up with this?' "

"The old lady told me, 'One of these days, it will be better for you. As you live on, you'll see that day,' " Long said.

Long took a deep breath last week and said, "That day is here."

With the vestiges of slavery in the Deep South still deeply ingrained in their memories, Long and his sister, 84-year-old Katherine Kennedy of Dayton, will be watching Barack **Obama's inauguration** Thursday, Jan. 20, as "God's answer to our **prayers**," Kennedy said.

Because travel at their ages is difficult, they will be glued to their TV sets for the day, they said.

"I didn't know I'd be living to see a day like today," Kennedy said. "I'm proud that (**Obama**) got in. I just hope he can change things in this country for the better."

At age 9, Kennedy, too, began working in the cotton fields on the Pettus family plantation near Selma, where William Pettus brought her grandmother to work after purchasing her from a slave auction in 1860. With the end of slavery, the Longs continued to work on the plantation because the Pettus family treated them fairly, the siblings said.

Earl Pettus, a lawyer and grandson of William, refused to let the sheriff and his deputies conduct unreasonable searches and seizures on his property. "He was a good man. He took up for his (workers)," Long said. "Back then, there was no law for a black man. They would just run you off the street."

As teenagers during World War II, Long and Kennedy found their way to Dayton "because that's where the jobs were," Kennedy said.

Neither sibling could read or write, but they refused to let that hold them back. For job applications, Kennedy said, "I would tell (the employer) the answers to the questions and they'd fill it in for me."

Kennedy became a baby sitter and housekeeper to some of the most prominent families in Dayton, including the Wamplers, who built Hara Arena. As a young, uneducated woman from the South, Kennedy had much to learn — like the time she came across a live lobster in the Wampler family refrigerator.

"I had to kill it with a book," she recalled with a laugh. "I had no idea what it was, and its claws (were) going like this." She waved her arms to demonstrate.

Long broke into the long-distance trucking business after the owner of a junkyard in Springfield asked him to drive an 18-wheeler to Columbus to pick up some scrap metal. Long had never driven a truck in his life, only tractors on a farm, but he got in the cab and took off.

"You can accomplish anything if you only give it a try," he said.

Despite an inability to read anything but numbers, "I never got lost in 18 years of driving all over this country," he said. His wife would mark up maps for him and Long said he made frequent stops at city gas stations to

ask directions.

Kennedy is proud that all of her five children and six grandchildren have been educated at least through high school. "She'd beat you to death if you didn't go to school," said her 31-year-old granddaughter Shatondra Montgomery.

Kennedy said **Obama**, a graduate of Columbia and Harvard universities, is a good example of what education can do for a person of any race in America.

"I believe in education," she said. "I really do."

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Jim DeBrosse Staff Writer, 'Obama's inauguration proves 'God's answer to our prayers'', *Dayton Daily News* (online), 11 Jan 2009 A8 <<https://infoweb-newsbank-com.oh0049.oplin.org/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/125B4754C984D808>>

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