

Testimony regarding HB 83
May 14, 2023

When I was a college student in the early 1980s, the cold war between the U.S. and USSR was still in full swing. Among other things, I took courses on Russian history and language as a way to try to understand what was happening in my country and world. In those classes we learned about state censorship, propaganda, state revision of histories that were not in alignment with the party of power's desire to present a glorious history of the Soviet Union, and state regulation of what topics and subjects could be taught in schools, including universities. My counterparts in the USSR, we were taught, did not have the freedom to take courses or discuss ideas regarding U.S. history or culture that were not sanctioned by ruling party, the communist party of the USSR. If a teacher were to go "off topic" (for example, by bringing up the existence of the Stalinist purges or the abuses of the KGB), students and citizens were incentivized to inform on that teacher, who would risk being cast as an agent of capitalist indoctrination and an enemy of the people. We students in the U.S. felt fortunate that the values of higher education in the USA allowed us to be free to learn histories and discuss ideas that did not have to be approved by the reigning party before being published, taught, or discussed. We were presumed to be open minded and capable of considering, discussing, and even debating different interpretations of history or ideas that were considered "controversial," and developing our own world views in the face of different ideas and perspectives on the best way to live life and contribute meaningfully to society. If we read and discussed Angela Davis, we did not automatically become Black Panthers. If we read and discussed Milton Friedman, we did not automatically become free market fundamentalists. As anyone who has any meaningful interaction with 18–21-year-old people can attest, teenagers and young adults are not prone to slavishly accept what adults tell them without questioning what they are told if it sounds off or contrary to their own viewpoints. The same is true for this generation of college students in Ohio. Young adults are perfectly capable of thinking for themselves and coming to their own conclusions about how best to live and contribute to our society. In our public universities they are exposed to a wide range of ideas and viewpoints both inside and outside of their classrooms. Being exposed to the ideas of others makes them more, not less, able to develop their own ideas and values. They do not need the party in power to protect them from ideas. To assume that they do is to misunderstand what our colleges in Ohio are providing for our students, which is the opportunity to learn how to learn and to develop as multifaceted human beings with the ability to think critically about different worldviews as well as their own. Today, as in my college days, I have yet to see a student read Angela Davis and become a Black Panther or Milton Friedman and become a free market fundamentalist. Students have minds of their own and don't need coddling by the state. To suggest that they do is insulting to them, as I'm sure you have heard from the students who have testified before you.

This is not a right or left issue. It is an issue fundamental to preserving and nurturing a healthy civil society. We learned from McCarthyism in the U.S. and from the example of the U.S.S.R, to reasonably distrust any kind of government intervention into education that gives authority to the party in power to regulate what can and can't be taught, what can and can't be discussed, what topics are too controversial to bring up, what elements of history are too embarrassing or

dangerous to mention. There are many reasons to object to SB 83, but for this nonpartisan reason alone it should be rejected.

Sincerely,
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