

**FREE SPEECH UNDER ATTACK:
BOOK BANS AND ACADEMIC CENSORSHIP**

HEARING

BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CIVIL RIGHTS AND CIVIL
LIBERTIES
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT
AND REFORM

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Documents are available at: docs.house.gov.

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Thursday, April 7, 2022

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CIVIL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 11:07 a.m., in room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building, and via Zoom; Hon. Jamie Raskin (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Raskin, Wasserman Schultz, Kelly, Pressley, Norton, Tlaib, Davis, Mace, Jordan, Sessions, Biggs, and Donalds.

Mr. RASKIN. Good morning. Thank you to all of our witnesses for joining us today. Thanks to all of the members participating. We are in the middle of votes, so there is going to be a little bit back and forth in classic congressional style. And I am very happy to be here with the wonderful ranking member of this subcommittee, Ms. Nancy Mace.

In 1943, in *West Virginia v. Barnette*, the Supreme Court struck down compulsory flag salutes as a violation of the First Amendment, stating, “If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, no matter how high or petty, shall prescribe what shall be orthodox in matters of politics, religion, nationalism, or other matters of opinion, or for citizens to confess by word or act or faith therein.” Then in 1969, in a case called *Tinker v. Des Moines School District*, which struck down Mary Beth Tinker’s suspension from middle school for refusing to remove her black armband in protest of the Vietnam War, the Court affirmed that neither teachers nor students shed their First Amendment rights at the schoolhouse gate.

In 1982, most relevant to our hearing today, in *Board of Education v. Pico*, the Supreme Court rejected the effort by a town school board in New York state to strip objectionable books from public school libraries. The members had gone to a conference promoting censorship of offensive and vulgar books, and came back with a target hit lists, the kind of hit list, which is now familiar to us, including “Slaughterhouse-Five” by Kurt Vonnegut, “Best Short Stories of Negro Writers”, edited by Langston Hughes, “Go Ask Alice” by an anonymous author, “Black Boy” by Richard Wright. And after widely brandishing a compilation of the most prurient and lurid and profane passages, the board actually overrode its own censorship committee, which had recommended purging only two books from the schools, and went ahead and censored nine of them. When the case made it to the Supreme

Court, the majority sided with the students who were claiming that the removal of books from the school library affected a form of political and ideological thought control, totally antithetical to the First Amendment of the Constitution.

Justice Brennan, who had been nominated to the Court by Republican President Eisenhower, announced the judgment of the Court and delivered an opinion that was joined by Justice John Paul Stevens, who had been nominated by President Ford, Justice Harry Blackmun, who had been nominated to the Court by President Nixon, and Justice Thurgood Marshall, who had been nominated to the Court by President Johnson. So this was a decision dominated by Supreme Court justices who had been nominated to the Court by GOP presidents, which is something that we need to think about because I hope, Ms. Mace, that everything we talk about today will transcend the traditional party lines.

In *Board of Education v. Pico*, Justice Brennan found that the Constitution protects not just the right to speak and to write, but the right to receive information and ideas. The First Amendment plays the central role in affording the public access to discussion, debate, and the dissemination of information and ideas. Freedom of inquiry, the Court ruled, extends to school libraries, and the selective removal of books from school libraries because someone considers the content offensive directly and sharply implicates students' free speech and thought. In school libraries, the regime of voluntary inquiry holds sway. The answer to books whose content or viewpoint you oppose or even deplore—check out this powerful logic—is to not read them or to write a negative review or even, shades of Voltaire here, to write your own book in answer.

The First Amendment, I used to tell my constitution law students, is like Abraham Lincoln's golden apple of liberty: it is like an apple, and everybody just wants to take one bite out of it. Somebody hates left-wing speech and somebody hates right-wing speech and wants to censor it, and somebody hates hate speech about gay people and someone wants to censor speech about the love lives of gay people, and someone wants to censor Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, because it uses the N-word, and someone else wants to censor Ibram Kendi's *Antiracist Baby* because they think it means that babies can be racist.

Everybody wants to take just one or two bites out of the apple. But if we allow all those bites, there is no apple left. The freedom of speech disappears. The way to save the apple for all of us is to learn to tolerate the speech you will bore as well as the speech you agree with. It is not always easy, but this is incumbent upon people living in a free democratic society. If we cancel or censor everything that people find offensive, nothing will be left. Everybody is offended by something, and that is why other people's level of offense cannot be the metric for defining whether your rights, or my rights are vaporized.

There is a famous story about Lenny Bruce, the somewhat risqué comedian from the middle of the last century, and someone said his show should be shut down because it offended him. And Lenny Bruce said from the stage, "My parents came to America in order to be offensive and not to be thrown in jail for it."

Now during National Library Week, a time to celebrate intellectual curiosity, scholarship, freedom of inquiry, and free expression, basic intellectual freedoms are under attack again. In 2021, the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom reported the highest numbers of censorious challenges to library books in its 20 years of tracking this data, 729 efforts to censor nearly 1,600 books. And in Texas, just one of these attempts to censor books implemented by a state legislator, has initiated the systematic review of at least 850 books in every school district in the state. There are over 1,000 school districts and 8,000 public schools in the Lone Star state. This challenge will require tens of thousands of teachers, librarians, and administrators to spend hundreds of thousands of hours reviewing the books to implement a regime of censorship at a time when school resources are already stretched thin and states across the country are facing teacher and staff shortages.

The vast majority of books being targeted are not mandatory or part of the curriculum. They are books of choice. Students can pull them off the shelves if they want to and check them out, or they can ignore them entirely. What books are being targeted? Well, some old favorite targets are back like "Catcher in the Rye", "Native Son", "Huckleberry Finn". There are also a bunch of these books I brought here: "Seahorse". We are going to hear today from the great Ruby Bridges, whose book, "Ruby Bridges Goes to School", has been the target of censorship. "The Bluest Eye" by Toni Morrison, who is a Nobel Prize winning author. A kids book about racism has been targeted for censorship, a book called "Hair Love", the infamous "Antiracist Baby Book", "Little Legends: Exceptional Men in Black History", and finally, "Little Dreamers: Visionary Women Around the World". So these are some of the most common books that are being targeted right now.

Obviously it is a legitimate subject for parents, teachers, principals, and school boards to discuss which books are the best and most age-appropriate curricular choices for different age groups and grades. This is what educators do, and the best ones include families, parents, and experts in the decisionmaking process all across the country. But that normal curricular and library selection process is completely different from whipping people up into a moral panic over the use of this or that word or passage in a book and then demanding its removal from the school library.

Fashions and censorship change. For a great deal of our history, books were censored because they were considered indecent or politically subversive, for example, of the slavery system like "Uncle Tom's Cabin", which was seized, censored, and burned in many Southern states as propaganda. Many books are being targeted for censorship these days simply because they address racism or white supremacy as historical or sociological realities, or address human sexuality or LGBTQ issues, because the protagonist or author is gay or a person of color, or for some other allegedly objectionable reason.

Finally, not quite sure where this is, if you can give me this, I wrote a book, which was censored called, "We the Students", or, I am sorry, forgive me. I correct myself. It has not been censored yet, but it is being targeted for removal from the schools in Texas. "We

the Students” was amazingly sponsored by the Supreme Court’s own Historical Society. It analyzes the constitutional freedoms of young people in public schools. It looks at a whole bunch of cases that affect kids in public schools, like censorship of newspapers, and yearbooks, and locker searches, and drug testing. And I am certain now that it must be the first book ever sponsored by the Supreme Court’s own Historical Society which is now being targeted for censorship. I only wish that the aspiring censors would read my discussion of Board of Education *v.* Pico on page 59 in my book before they censor it, because it tells them everything they need to know about how it is illegitimate to strip books from school libraries because somebody disagrees with it.

OK. So the books on the poster boards have all been targeted for censorship or actually banned from schools. “This Is Your Time” by Ruby Bridges, a remarkable figure in the American Civil Rights Movement and we have the honor of hearing from today, has been challenged and targeted for censorship. Why? Simply because it said that a book describing the story of how a little girl who was one of the first to integrate public schools in her native Louisiana in the midst of a racist backlash may make white children feel uncomfortable. And this, I think, radically understates the powers of empathy, compassion, and solidarity that all children or most children have and are capable of developing. It also suggests that the actual lived experiences of people should be suppressed if learning of their experiences would make other people uncomfortable, a far-fetched, unworkable, and unjust principle that cuts against the fundamental American idea of free expression.

All right. With that, I am going to turn it over to Ms. Mace for your opening statement.

Ms. MACE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I should have brought my book “In the Company of Men: A Woman at the Citadel” this morning—

Mr. RASKIN. I brag about your book all the time.

Ms. MACE. Yes, but thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to have the opportunity today to highlight the importance of freedom of speech in our country, as well as the important work to ensure that K through 12 curriculums in public schools serve our students well.

The First Amendment to the Constitution guarantees the right of freedom of speech to all Americans, and the First Amendment states that Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of speech. The government may only set reasonable, time, place, and manner restrictions in very limited circumstances. The government cannot and should not police the speech of its citizens even when that speech is disagreeable or repugnant. When they say it aloud, sometimes we want to know what they have to say. We don’t punish thought criminals in this country unless, of course, you are maybe a main character in Orwell’s “1984”.

Freedom of speech isn’t just a legal mandate enshrined in our Constitution. It is an essential element to democracy. This fundamental freedom ensures all views across the spectrum are debated within the marketplace of ideas, and public institutions of higher education are bound to abide by the First Amendment’s prohibition and restrictions on freedom of speech. Yet often in this country, we

see a tax on that very freedom. Public universities and colleges frequently run afoul the First Amendment freedom by enforcing broad or overly broad speech codes or by chilling speech across college campuses using bias response teams to investigate thought criminals. There have also been disturbing campaigns on these campuses to expel students by our faculty or disinvite speakers who hold views that are considered to go against the progressive consensus or groupthink. These universities and colleges are unlawfully stifling speech to coddle young adults at a time in their educational careers where they should be exposed to a variety of ideas and perspectives.

While progressive activists shut down speech on college campuses, they are trying to hyper-expose young children who are still learning to read write, add, and subtract. And I can personally remember a story when my kids were in elementary school, and I was driving them home, picked them up from the carpool line in school that day, and they had a government lesson on government democracy versus socialism versus communism. And I asked them, which one is best, and they said socialism. So I pulled over on the closest exit off the interstate and had a conversation about the differences. And then they walked out of that conversation saying, "No, mommy, democracy is the best form of government for the United States of America."

In an effort to indoctrinate our young students, progressives are burdening curricula with divisive and radical ideologies such as race essentialism, racial scapegoating, and content of a sexual nature that is not appropriate oftentimes for very young children. All children should be taught the academic skills they need to succeed, along with the history of our country, the good, the bad, and the ugly. You must also teach our children about the problematic chapters in our history, and we must also teach them about the heroes who lead us and have led us to a more perfect union. In fact, one of those heroes today is joining our hearing today, Ruby Bridges, who you mentioned earlier, a civil rights icon and author who made history as a six-year-old girl, courageously braving a hostile crowd to integrate an all-white elementary school in Louisiana.

And in my home state of South Carolina, we have so many of those heroic stories that should be taught in our schools from Harriet Tubman, who rescued 750 slaves in one night in Beaufort County, South Carolina, to Joseph Rainey, who was the first African American to represent in the U.S. House of Representatives, who represented, by the way, South Carolina's 1st congressional District, the seat that I sit in today.

Public schools should exercise discretion with parental input and oversight to decide what is included in their curricula and what books to include in their libraries, especially for young elementary school students. But no child attending our public schools should be subject to government indoctrination, or exposed to radical ideologies while they are still building the foundations of their education. Instead, we ought to be teaching critical thinking skills so college-age students can discern, argue, and act on those values when faced with open and frank academic discourse. And, of course, our high school students, even if they aren't going to col-

lege, should be prepared to enter the work force when they graduate.

I thank all the witnesses for appearing today and looking forward to a robust discussion on the First Amendment, freedom of speech, and how we can work together to preserve that freedom for every single American. Thank you, Chairman Raskin, and I yield back.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you, Ms. Mace, for a very thoughtful opening statement.

Before I introduce our witnesses and swear them in, I just want to state that PEN America just released a report this morning finding that from July 1 of last year to March 31 of this year, there were 1,586 book bans that were implemented across 86 school districts and 26 different states. Forty-one percent of the banned titles had protagonists who are prominent secondary characters of color, 22 percent directly address race and racism, and 33 percent explicitly address LGBTQ issues. So though that is not a majority, that is a lot of where the action is. And of course there are the traditional targets that we know of, like *Catcher in the Rye*, and *Huckleberry Finn*, and George Orwell's 1984, and so on.

Now I want to introduce our first panel of witnesses who are all high school students and will be testifying but not answering questions. First, we have Shreya Mehta, who is a student from Richland, Washington. Good morning. Then we are going to hear from Olivia Pituch, who is a student from York County, Pennsylvania. Finally, we will hear from Christina Ellis, who is also a student from York County, Pennsylvania. The witnesses will be unmuted, so we can swear them in.

Please stand and raise your right hands if you can do that.

Do you swear or affirm that the testimony you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

[A chorus of ayes.]

Mr. RASKIN. Let the record reflect the witnesses have all answered in the affirmative. Thank you.

Without objection, your written statements will be made part of the record.

And with that, Ms. Mehta, you are now recognized for your five minutes of testimony.

**STATEMENT OF SHREYA MEHTA, HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT,
RICHLAND, WASHINGTON**

Ms. MEHTA. Thank you so much. Hi. My name is Shreya Mehta. I'm a senior this year at Hanford High School, a public school in Eastern Washington state. I want to start off by thanking the subcommittee for giving me the opportunity to testify today. It's an honor to be representing the students in our country, both as an organizer and as a booklover.

Mr. RASKIN. Can you just speak directly into the camera and the microphone, as close as you can just because you're fading out a little bit.

Ms. MEHTA. OK. So my district has had fewer outward book challenges, but the internal damages, the culture of censorship of BIPOC and LGBTQ+ voices and

[inaudible] it has caused is immense. I believe that the rampant censorship is affecting even more districts than we think and supporting the bullying of marginalized students around the country. The rising book bans in my district has created a lot of fear so that entire classes centering diverse perspectives and plenty of new books that have been proposed have been stopped in their tracks for no other reason than fear of retaliation. I've spoken personally with educators who have been coerced into putting away books with LGBTQ+ or racial equity content.

Marginalized students have unfortunately become collateral damage in this current moral panic. Just a week ago, I went to a school board meeting where a man spoke out against homosexual teachings and a woman spoke out against gender equality books. And these are some of the same adults who scream for bans but also misgender students and call them things and threats, which is why I believe this censorship is, in large part, tied to a lot of bullying happening, and oftentimes thinly veiled racist, sexist, or homophobic political statements that impede a student's right to intellectual freedom and to embrace their individual identities.

I think students have their right to check out age-appropriate material from their libraries, whether or not it contains material that's divisive, because the fact of the matter is that students are facing divisive topics in their everyday life, and they need to know that they're not alone in their struggle. And I keep on asking myself how many decades will it take before we can erase a generation of LGBTQ+ students in particular, who aren't institutionally guided and systemically educated to be as invisible and ashamed of themselves as possible?

Mr. RASKIN. Ms. Mehta, forgive me. I hate to interrupt you. Ms. Mace and I just have to go vote. We're going to freeze your clock right there at the halfway point. We'll be back as quickly as we can. We're going to drive over there, and then you can come finish it, and then we'll go to our next witness.

Thanks everybody for having [inaudible].

[Recess.]

Mr. RASKIN. The hearing will resume. And Ms. Mehta, you have two minutes and 30 seconds left to complete your statement.

Ms. MEHTA. Thank you. So I'm on spring break right now, but as an experiment for the subcommittee, I counted the amount of times I heard the f-slur used in the hallway the last day I was at school. It was 15 uses within 30 minutes worth of passing periods, one instance of bullying every two minutes, shorter than, you know, I've been speaking by this time. And I think that this kind of hatred is learned and entirely preventable, but the bullying has only been amplified as book bans have become more pervasive. And the political climate has made it that censorship amplifies many peoples', especially politicians', internalized homophobia and transphobia.

I don't think LGBTQ+ characters subject matter is inherently inappropriate for any specific age. I think there's age-appropriate gay characters for five-year-olds and 15-year-olds, and that school librarians know how to best use the literature. I believe that words have a lot of power and that they can teach us empathy and strengthen our democracy, and I really wish that political polariza-

tion wasn't dictating our education. I want to learn about my friends, even if I disagree with them. I want us to understand one another.

But right now, my intellectual freedom and my students' intellectual freedom is not being supported or fought for. Please support this and support the fact that it's not politicians, but librarians and educators in partnership with the students they serve, who are best-suited and trained to cultivate a collection of books that are age appropriate and serve their diverse student bodies. And please make this the last generation of marginalized youth that have to grow up and feel invisible and ashamed of themselves.

Thank you to the subcommittee for amplifying student voices today. That's all I have.

Mr. RASKIN. And thank you very much for your thoughtful testimony.

Ms. Pituch, you are now recognized for your five minutes.

**STATEMENT OF OLIVIA PITUCH, HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT,
YORK COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA**

Ms. PITUCH. Good morning, and thank you, Chairman Raskin, Ranking Member Mace, and members of the subcommittee for this amazing opportunity. I'm Olivia Pituch. I'm a senior at Central York High School, a member of the LGBTQ+ community, an activist, and the secretary and social media advisor of the Panther Anti-Racist Union, known as PARU, of Central York School District in Pennsylvania.

In late August, an article published by a local news source revealed that the Central York School Board had banned an extensive list of resources, including books, articles, movies, and more, all written by BIPOC or LGBTQ+ authors containing BIPOC or LGBTQ+ characters, or about BIPOC or LGBTQ+ awareness and history. The booklet specifically included materials such as "I Am Enough" by Grace Byers, "I Am Rosa Parks" by Brad Meltzer, and "Malala: My Story of Standing Up for Girls' Rights" by Malala. All of these resources would help to not only aid BIPOC and LGBTQ+ students in embracing themselves and their identity, but would also spread awareness and educate all students on the importance of diversity.

When this list was pushed out as a banned book list, I was appalled. Central, being the second most diverse district in the county, prided itself on diversity, but this ban silenced BIPOC voices and frankly announced that their identities were not welcome. With the help of my fellow students, Christina Ellis, the vice president of PARU, Edha Gupta, the president of PARU, Renee Ellis, our communications director, and Rebecca Delgado, our artistic director, and our amazing advisors, Ben Hodge and Patricia Jackson, we stood up to this act of discrimination.

In the beginning, we organized small peaceful protests that were located outside of the high school, ending 15 minutes before the school day began. These caught the eye of local press and news outlets. This was no longer between a few students. Our story, voices, and messages were broadcast on many local channels and expressed in articles through interviews and coverage of the peaceful protests. Media coverage helped the community receive 3,000 books

from the list to handout for free to community members and helped two community protests take place.

It has been a hard journey in loving myself as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. I've been surrounded by amazing people who helped me through and offered advice, friends who are also members of the community, but not everyone is this lucky.

Many kids find refuge in going to school and being within an inclusive community, but as education on inclusion slips away, that safe haven does too. I have heard slurs being thrown around, LGBTQ+ kids being made fun of, verbally abused and more. Ignorance is very real. It is important to teach inclusion and equality. It is important to have representation. I deserve to walk into my school library and find a book with someone like me. This is why education on inclusion is important and necessary. Without it, those kids who came to school for safety and acceptance will no longer have that safe spot.

Too many kids have attempted suicide, harmed themselves, or been verbally or physically abused for who they are. Too many kids are alone and don't have that safe haven. Books that represent them offer them comfort and open conversations provide that safe place for all students. It is important to teach the students inclusion so that they can save a person's life just by showing them compassion and respect. We can't force LGBTQ+ kids into situations where the only time they hear about their community and themselves is when their rights are being debated between students. We have a place in this world and in this community. If I would have had open discussions, representation, and education, I would have been able to embrace and love myself a lot earlier on. Rather than sitting fearfully with my thoughts and feelings, I would have been able to learn what my feelings mean, and that it is OK to be me.

Silence is deafening, but these books help to break through the silence and allow children to flourish. Kids need to see themselves, especially portrayed in a positive light. Provide a space where they can celebrate who they are. Give them the resources to help them love themselves for who they are. Don't silence the voices that are finally beginning to be heard. Thank you.

Mr. RASKIN. Ms. Pituch, thank you very much for your thoughtful testimony.

And now, Ms. Ellis, you are recognized for your five minutes.

**STATEMENT OF CHRISTINA ELLIS, HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT,
YORK COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA**

Ms. ELLIS. Good morning. My name is Christina Ellis, and I'm a senior at Central York High School in York, Pennsylvania, the vice president of PARU, The Panther Anti-Racist Union at Central York. To start off, I'd like to extend my gratitude to Chairman Raskin, Ranking Member Mace, and members of the subcommittee, who made it possible for Olivia and I to come and speak today.

I would like to discuss the book/resource ban that divided our school district. These books and resources banned were books such as, "I Am Enough" by Grace Byers, "All Are Welcome" by Alexandra Penfold, and even "Ven a Mi Casa" by Dr. Seuss. I remember the moment I heard about the ban. Edha Gupta, who's the President of PARU, messages me an article released by York Dispatch,

a local news source, discussing in great detail the type of “divisive resources” that were banned.

It didn’t take long for us and countless others to realize these listed resources targeted the voice and representation of BIPOC communities, authors, and creators. We knew this ban didn’t represent our district as the second most diverse district within York County. Thus, we created an executive board within PARU. Our first initiative was to peacefully protest outside of my high school every morning until the ban was reversed, and that is what we did. Seventy-plus students and even staff at the high school stood outside with signs like Black Lives Matter and Diversity Belongs in Education. We stood in solidarity until our presence was known, and soon enough, our presence was recognized. News anchors, like Fox News and CNN, picked up our story, and after all of our news coverage, our school board reversed the ban as of September 20, 2021. We did not rejoice at this news for long because we realize that there is so much more work that needs to be done.

Myself and those in PARU will continue to strive for equality and diversity not only with our classrooms, but within our community. The reason why I stood against my school district’s book ban was because I didn’t want future African-American kids to go through some of the things I went through growing up because of the lack of cultural sensitivity in my schooling experience. I didn’t want students, in general, feeling like their culture didn’t matter because, in school, there was little to no representation for them.

Here’s one of my personal stories. In elementary school, when the teacher would put a document on about slavery, some kids would turn around and stare at me, the only Black girl in the classroom. I found myself avoiding bringing my Caribbean food to lunch in fear of the looks and snarky comments from peers because the food was foreign to them. And sadly enough, I spent the majority of my K through 12 schooling straightening my hair so I wouldn’t stand out. I wanted to blend in and not be different. I didn’t want random people touching my hair without my permission. And sadly, still to this day, I encounter people who think it’s OK for them to run their hands through my hair.

Books that highlight our differences and teach others how to address diversity are crucial. These books shouldn’t be up for debate. A slideshow presentation at the beginning of school year telling kids to be kind is not enough. It’s not OK to joke about the way a student chooses to dress or what they pack for lunch. These books can help educate kids on various cultures and ways of life, and we need to rely on our trained educators to handle teaching these difficult and hard topics.

This will decrease bullying and judgmental stares because kids will learn to approach their peers not from a place of educational ignorance, but from a place of compassion and understanding. This world needs more people who want to pay attention to others and not only themselves. Banning books of those of minority background and unique backgrounds, silences their voices and erases their history, and arguably is taking away the right to express themselves.

These are words in a page that have the power to change a cold heart to warm. It’s not indoctrination. It’s education. Thank you.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you very much to all the students for your really powerful and illuminating testimony. It helps us a lot.

The first panel is now excused. Please send our regards to your families and your teachers as you get back and tell them we're very proud of what you've done back at school and also what you did for the country today here in Congress.

We will now welcome the second panel. I want to introduce our second panel of witnesses, and I will begin to introduce them as they enter and are seated.

First, we have Samantha Hull, who is a librarian from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Then we will hear from Mindy Freeman, who is a parent in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Then we will hear from Dr. Jonathan W. Pidluzny, who is the vice president of academic affairs at the American Council of Trustees and Alumni. Next, we will hear from Jessica Berg, who is a teacher in Loudoun County, Virginia, not far from where we are. And last but not least, a witness who really needs no elaborate introduction for America, Ruby Bridges, who is a civil rights luminary and an author.

The witnesses will please be unmuted so we can swear them in. If everybody would rise and raise your right hands.

Do you swear or affirm that the testimony you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth so help you God?

[A chorus of ayes.]

Mr. RASKIN. Let the record show that all the witnesses have answered in the affirmative. Thank you.

Without objection, your written statements are going to be put in the record so we have every word that you want to submit officially for the congressional record.

But with that, you're now recognized for your verbal testimony, and we've asked you to sum it up in five minutes, if you can do that.

Ms. Hull, you are now recognized.

STATEMENT OF SAMANTHA HULL, LIBRARIAN, LANCASTER COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

Ms. HULL. Good morning, and thank you, Chairman Raskin, Ranking Member Mace, and members of the subcommittee for the opportunity to speak on such an important issue. We are here because books have been questioned, challenged, and banned at record rates this school year, and there are students watching from near and far. In fact, I've brought some of them with me as support in notes that they have given to me.

Administrators have made hasty decisions. School board members have jumped to conclusions based on out-of-context experts, and librarians scramble to play catch-up to fight for our students' rights. When books are removed, communities lose the voice that that book represents. Measuring the damage of lost voices is daunting and longitudinal. We can measure the soaring rates of mental health disorders in adolescents. Many can directly correlate the teen mental health crisis to feelings of discontent, loneliness, and a lack of belonging. These are exactly the feelings that arise when we believe we are alone in what we are experiencing, and these feelings can be especially brutal and isolating in adolescents.

The ability to learn about and appreciate the diversity of the human experience, perspective, and opinions is crucial to gaining a sense of belonging. We can gain this ability through our access to books and other resources. This is why a singular reaction to a book should never result in the immediate removal of a resource but instead be the basis for our conversation, to understand the purpose of a library and the support and resources that librarians offer.

If a student reacts strongly to a book, it can be the start of a conversation with their family or trusted adult about the topic that caused the reaction. During the eight years I've been a librarian, I've seen the publishing industry react and support the need among adolescents for books representing a spectrum of thought and experience. Books have made a difference in our kid's well-being, ability to think more broadly, be more innovative, and be more empathetic. We see this in the many students who are standing up for what they believe in. Those students realized early that they have a voice and that their voice matters.

School librarians have dedicated our careers to responding to our students' needs, and it motivates us to work hard as we keep our curated collections balanced. We work tirelessly to provide a sanctuary for students in the library, the place that they feel safe. Feeling safe, however, is not always the same as feeling comfortable. Growth doesn't necessarily happen when we're comfortable. It definitely will not occur when we are stagnant, or when we're uninterested, or when we accept the way things have always been done. Growth is uncomfortable, but it builds grit and determination. To learn is to grow, and when we're in an environment that fosters open-minded communication, the discomfort is outweighed by the possibility of learning.

Open-minded communication is not fostered when we start making individual, monolithic, or one-sided decisions, especially without trained librarians' input about books based on out-of-context readings. When we take this road, we are limiting growth, we are stifling progress, and we are acting in the most undemocratic way possible. Adhering to loud minority viewpoints and not making space for all voices to be heard is not progress.

Librarians urge everyone to take a minute, to consider why a book or resource makes us uncomfortable, what it might be trying to teach us, and what we are resisting to learn. While we are willing to fight, and those fights are always worth it, they take time, they take energy, and, most importantly, they remove us from our students, from our classes, and from our libraries.

For a while, those lights were lonely. It seems like everything was happening behind closed doors, and many of us have found the strength and space to speak out on the injustices of self-censoring and outright book banning. Since those brave moments, the army has grown. Parents, students, community members, public librarians, store owners, authors, lawyers, teachers, and local politicians have embraced the discomfort and joined the fight. Librarians are in it for the long gain. We fight with courage in our hearts to balance the shelf so students can see themselves in what they read, find what they need, when they need it, and have a safe place to

do so. If we don't have the answers, we'll help them find someone who does.

Our democracy and our students' well-being hinge on the access young people have to fully representative resources curated by librarians and teachers with the education, expertise, and experience to handle this work. Without institutions that are curated by professionals to encapsulate the wide range of historical perspectives, we have no history. Without a location in our schools that is staffed by trained librarians, we have lackluster resources and ill-informed students. Without safe places to read, think, and discuss, we have no future.

We librarians know firsthand our students, our world problem solvers, are ever curious. Through our student's curiosity, knowledge is generated and innovation occurs. That is growth. That is progress. That is democracy.

Mr. RASKIN. What a wonderful statement. Thank you very much, Ms. Hull.

Ms. Freeman, you are now recognized for your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF MINDY FREEMAN, PARENT, BUCKS COUNTY,
PENNSYLVANIA**

Ms. FREEMAN. Thank you, Chairman Raskin, Ranking Member Mace, and members of the subcommittee. My name is Mindy Freeman, and my pronouns are she/her. I'm a parent from Bucks County, Pennsylvania, where I lived with my spouse since we were married 25 years ago. I'm speaking from the heart as a person who loves their children, as a former elementary school teacher, and as someone who cares deeply about the education of our youth.

I'm not a political person. I've been a registered Republican and a registered Democrat. I didn't even know what the House Oversight Subcommittee was until last week, and yet I'm here in the most political place on earth. This is 2022, and despite all the major issues needing our Nation's highest attention, book banning and censorship is a subject that we are now forced to be tackling, an attack on public education, diversity of thought, inclusion of people, and the ability of citizens to consume real, authentic stories of who we are.

Books have a critical role in people's lives. My youngest child, Lily, who is here with me today, is a 15-year-old sophomore honors student at our local public high school. She acts, sings, dances, and draws beautifully. She loves to hang out with her friends, ride her bike with her dad, spend time with her grandparents and binge watch shows with me, you know, kids' stuff. Lily also happens to be a female of trans experience. She is proud to be trans, and we are proud of her. Being able to be visible for others and seeing herself in the books she reads is so very important. I want to be clear. If there is one soundbite to arise from my appearance here today, let it be this one: no book made my child become transgender any more than a book could have turned her eyes from brown to blue.

Let me tell you a little bit about Lily's journey. Lily will tell you that as soon as she could recognize herself in the mirror, the person looking back at her was not the person she was. The male presenting person reflecting back at her did not align correctly with her being. As Lily was growing up during her younger years, she

presented in what would be considered a more feminine way. As someone that had never known a transgender person, while this out-of-gender norm behavior made my spouse and I question what was going on with Lily, we did not discourage her from enjoying the thing she loved.

In early elementary school, Lily lacked the words, insight, and confidence to describe what she was feeling. As school activities began to separate boys from girls, this only frustrated her. In fourth grade, when boys and girls were separated to learn about what was going on in their bodies during puberty, Lily began to panic. After sharing her feelings with my older two daughters, she came to my spouse and me. We did not have the knowledge of everything LGBTQ, especially trans related, but what we did know is that we loved our child and that we would support her no matter what, and this is when our learning journey began.

We shared with Lily's fifth grade teacher what Lily was going through, and her teacher brought to our attention Alex Gino's book, "George", now "Melissa", an award-winning children's novel about a trans fourth grader and said that Lily had the option to read it. We appreciated the visibility that this provided to Lily as well as the support not only by the teacher, but by the school for having age-appropriate books accessible on the shelves. Two years later, in seventh grade, her social studies teacher made it easy for kids like Lily and students who wanted to learn about their LGBTQ classmates to check out age-appropriate books, LGBTQ literature from his classroom shelves. These books helped Lily's friends better-understand what she and others were going through. Still middle school was a trial, and high school hasn't been easy either. Three teens, two from her school, are accused and charged with threatening and targeting Lily simply because she is transgender.

It's no wonder LGBTQ youth have a higher rate of depression and suicide than their cisgender straight counterparts. Having age-appropriate LGBTQ books on our K through 12 library shelves contributes to an affirming and safe environment in our public schools. Banning and censoring books, especially LGBTQ books in schools, promotes divisiveness, harm, and hate instead of kindness, education and awareness. Schools are places of learning, and when you take away access to books, it's a discriminatory practice. Banning and censoring books benefits absolutely nobody. It's a practice which limits freedoms of speech and expression and facilitates exclusionary practices.

I have never lobbied on Capitol Hill, run for political office, and I do not sit on a school board. I do not plan to either. I'm a parent who knows firsthand how having access to LGBTQ books in our K through 12 schools played a positive role in my daughter's life. And we, all of us, need to ensure that all of our children continue to have access to diverse books in their school libraries.

Thank you so much.

Mr. RASKIN. And thank you very much, and thanks for joining us in the most political place on earth.

Ms. FREEMAN. That's right.

Mr. RASKIN. And, Dr. Pidluzny, you are now recognized for your five minutes of testimony.

**STATEMENT OF JONATHAN PIDLUZNY, VICE PRESIDENT OF
ACADEMIC AFFAIRS, AMERICAN COUNCIL OF TRUSTEES
AND ALUMNI**

Mr. PIDLUZNY. It's an honor to address the Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties. Thank you, Chairman Raskin, Ranking Member Mace, and members of the subcommittee.

For the last 26 years, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni has been working to protect academic freedom and free expression in American higher education. We are grateful for this opportunity to address these critical issues. The data show conclusively, I think, that the problem of academic censorship has reached crisis levels on our college campuses. Instances of speaker disinvitations on the basis of viewpoint, intimidating shutdowns, and academic cancellations are a routine feature of campus life today, with documented examples running well into the hundreds.

Mountains of survey research data demonstrate that the current campus climate chills free and open discourse. To take one of many examples, a forthcoming active survey of students at 12 elite liberal arts colleges found that 59 percent report that they are somewhat or very uncomfortable publicly disagreeing with a professor, only 32 percent said that their administration makes it very or extremely clear that free speech is protected, 54 percent said that they self-censor themselves at least occasionally, and 41 percent say that it is always or sometimes acceptable to shut down a speaker.

Students' self-censorship appears to be linked to low levels of ideological diversity among professors. Among students who reported self-censoring very often, 67 percent said that increasing the faculty viewpoint diversity would improve the climate for campus expression. Studies of viewpoint diversity in the professoriate have found severe imbalances by political affiliation with registered Democrat to Republican ratios reaching as high as 60 to 1 on some campuses. Available evidence suggests that these disparities are not accidental. Fifty-five percent of academic philosophers and 38 percent of social psychologists admit to at least some level of willingness to discriminate against conservatives in the faculty hiring process.

Hundreds of universities have gone so far as to build bias response teams to investigate student and faculty speech. Students have used them to report on others for watching Ben Shapiro for ableist comments like, "on the other hand." They've reported faculty for giving a wrong look, and young Republicans for every conceivable instance of wrong think, all of this in the hope of setting off a burdensome investigation that will at least be reputation-damaging even where the speech is protected. Universities that encourage students to inform on their peers and professors create an anti-intellectual dynamic reminiscent of a Soviet police state where nobody knows what it is safe to say or who it is safe to talk to. Two appeals courts have ruled that bias response teams are exerting an unconstitutional chilling effect and yet hundreds remain in operation.

Since this hearing is also concerned with K-12, I'd like to make three points specific to it. First, K-12 schools are funded by taxpayers because their mission is to advance the public interest. Cur-

ricula standards should, therefore, balance the concerns of families, policymakers, school board officials, and business leaders, while leveraging the expertise of educators. Not long ago, school districts around the country were removing “To Kill a Mockingbird” and “Huck Finn” from reading lists because of the N-word which features prominently. That doesn’t mean Mark Twain and Harper Lee had their books banned. It means communities made a judgment about curricula value, however much many may disagree with it.

Second, conversations about public school curriculum should be occurring at the state and local levels. The framers understood that educating children is a paramount parental responsibility. It can be delegated to others, but it is precisely the kind of function that should be kept close to the people. In a Federal democracy, local communities will settle on different policies and teach different books. That is the essence of representative government.

Third, it is the responsibility of public school systems to teach materials that are age-appropriate. The American Library Association’s list of the top 10 most challenged books helps us to understand what the real issue that brings us here is today. The first and second entries on the list, “Gender Queer” and “Lawn Boy”, are so graphic that parents reading them at school board meetings have repeatedly been stopped because the content is so obscene. When school board members judge content too hot for adults to handle, it isn’t censorship to remove them from school libraries. It’s their responsibility.

If public school systems were systematically targeting the writings of, say, civil rights leaders, in response to parental or political pressure, I would not be here testifying today. As Justice Harry Blackmun has written, school officials may not remove books for the purpose of restricting access to the political ideas or social perspectives discussed in them. That is not what is happening in the majority of these cases. These books are being challenged generally because they contain age-inappropriate sexual content that is neither necessary to create an inclusive learning environment and are uniquely well-suited to promote diversity of thought.

In conclusion, the most serious threats to free speech in an academic context are occurring in higher education today, not K–12. On our campuses, self-censorship is endemic, viewpoint discrimination is the norm, and students and faculty are routinely targeted by school-sponsored bias response teams for the political content of their speech.

Thank you.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you very much for your thoughtful testimony.

And, Ms. Berg, you are now recognized for your five minutes.

STATEMENT OF JESSICA BERG, TEACHER, LOUDOUN COUNTY, VIRGINIA

Ms. BERG. Thank you, Chairman Raskin, Ranking Member Mace, and the subcommittee, for inviting me here today to speak on this very important issue. My name is Jessica Berg. I am a high school English and women and gender studies teacher in Loudoun County, Virginia, where I live with my husband and my two extraordinary daughters. Teaching is not a profession I planned on, but there is not a day that goes by that I’m not thankful for what-

ever fates led me into the classroom because it has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life.

However, this past December, along with teachers across the Nation, I was on the precipice of leaving the profession because of what political groups and politicians have done to education. The crusade against critical thinking has instilled fear in teachers, fear of repercussions for speaking up, fear of being fired for doing what we know to be right, fear of receiving actual death threats from members in our own community. And the continued challenge to our professionalism, our expertise, our compassion, and empathy for all of our students has cracked the will of underpaid and overworked teachers.

Today, I hope to give a very brief insight as to what we educators and English teachers aim to achieve in the classroom. But more than that, I wanted to share some words for my students because theirs is the voice that is often forgotten in these discussions.

The one thing I save year to year is the letters my students write, and rereading them, I was reminded that the biggest thing students take away from their time in English is the safe space created within the classroom walls and the books that play a pivotal role in their lives, leading them to lessons that extend beyond the classroom walls. But these are the books you are banning. Books offer a mirror to readers so they can see themselves reflected in some way, be it their gender, their race, their culture, their identity or their experience, and it make them feel less alone in the world. When they see themselves reflected, students do not feel erased, and they maintain their self-efficacy, the belief that their voice matters. And when I think about the books frequently being challenged, the only connection I see between them is that they are the books that give voice to the most marginalized in our society.

A few years ago, I taught a brilliant young woman who almost missed her chance to attend college because she didn't yet understand the power of her voice. In a letter she wrote, "I will miss you so much when I go off to college, but I will always remember you. You have taught me so many lessons inside and outside the classroom. You have changed my life because you showed me during a difficult time that my voice matters, and I should stand up for what I believe in." But the political groups and politicians out there banning books don't want that. They don't want everyone to feel like they have a voice because the status quo is predicated on silence. And not only is banning these stories and censoring history, preventing students from being able to find their voice, but it is negatively impacting my ability as an educator to connect with my students in a meaningful way.

The entrance into these life lessons that leave a lasting impact on students is stories. As one student wrote, "Ms. Berg taught me a life lesson through her evident passion for the worlds of novels. She lets us explore the world outside the bubble that we rarely escape. This lesson is one I will never forget." That is the power of books. They offer students a window to see the world beyond themselves in the hopes that they understand that what divides us as humans is infinitesimal in the face of what unites us, but these are the books you're banning. And it is a fallacy when political groups ban these books under the guise of parental rights.

I am a parent. We have rights in our student's education, but that parent-teacher team has been broken by the divisiveness of the moment. The loud, angry subset of political parents no longer communicate directly with teachers, and instead, they go straight to the school board and yell. If you do not want your child to read a book, that is absolutely fine. But it does not give you the right to make that decision for every other student in the county or across the Nation who might find a lifeline in the very book you banned.

I understand wanting to protect kids. I want to protect my two daughters fiercely and for as long as I can. But I also want to prepare them for the real world so when I am not there to be their shield, I want to know that I have armed them with the sword of every story and the impenetrable power of knowledge that just might give them the ability to survive. And through my work as an educator, I hope to make the world my daughters will head into a little bit better, one story and one student at a time.

And it was a former student who defined what we aim to do as educators so eloquently when she said, "Ms. Berg, you are the best and most inspirational teacher I've ever had. You taught me more than grammar and writing skills. You opened my mind and prepared me to seek understanding from a wide variety of perspectives. I am better-equipped to process life and its complexities because of the time I spent in your class, and I can't thank you enough for that."

Maybe if we all were prepared to seek understanding from a wide variety of perspectives, we, too, would be better-equipped to process life and all of its gorgeous complexities. Thank you for your time.

Mr. RASKIN. Well, that was just outstanding, and even with 36 seconds left over, so well done, Ms. Berg, a model to witnesses throughout Capitol Hill.

Now I'm going to recognize myself for five minutes of questions.

Oh, I'm sorry, Ms. Bridges. You've been so patient with us. We've got the great Ruby Bridges with us, and you are now recognized for your five minutes. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF RUBY BRIDGES, CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVIST,
AUTHOR**

Ms. BRIDGES. Good morning, Mr. Chairman, and Mrs. Mace, Members of Congress, and the subcommittee. Thank you for having me. I am indeed honored for this opportunity to speak on this very important subject.

When I first heard about possible book bans, including the targeting of my books, my initial thought was to avoid responding altogether as I thought it didn't deserve more attention, and the efforts would naturally subside. However, as these bans have somehow gained even more momentum, I feel it is now important to speak up. I cannot understand why are we banning books, I thought. My books are written to bring people together. Why would they be banned? But the real question is, why are we banning any books at all? Surely, we are better than this. We are the United States of America with freedom of speech.

In every book I've written, I have purposely highlighted and lifted up those human beings as Americans who were seeking the best version of our country, like Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, who helped to win the landmark case that set me on this journey. As a six-year-old walking through the doors of this all-white elementary school in 1960, I wanted my readers to know I did not walk alone. I was protected by dedicated Federal marshals, commissioned by a sitting President of the United States. I was nurtured and taught by a compassionate teacher, mentored by a world-renowned child psychologist, all of whom were white, by the way, and mentioned in these very same books that some wish to ban. They became a part of my support system along with a supportive community, my village, my courageous family, and friends. So when I share my experiences, my story in these books, I share our shared history, good, bad, and ugly.

As a six-year-old child, I had no idea I was taking a historic walk. My parents were sharecroppers raised in rural Mississippi, not activists. For them, education was a luxury they could not afford. They only knew that they wanted better for their own children: a mother that felt education would provide that better life. A father, who was a decorated Korean War vet, was skeptical, rightfully so, remembering his own experiences in a segregated branch of the military. He said he was always seen and treated as just another colored soldier, war hero or not.

Needless to say, this historic walk put them at odds with one another, even though the same walk helped to change the face of education in this country, and I became the poster child for the civil rights movement. My father never lived to see the change that this walk helped to promote. As a six-year-old, I had so many questions. What happened? How did it happen to me? Why that school? Sadly, no one, including my parents, could provide answers or they didn't want to. History happened, and it was over.

Being six with limited capacity, I often wondered if it was all just a dream. How was I to ever understand my own place in history? This was a part of my identity. And yet, no one around me was equipped to discuss it, or maybe they just didn't want to. They didn't want to share it with me. I was always six. Let's face it, there was no Black History Month then, and the textbooks we use were obsolete then, and they are still obsolete today.

I learned the full impact of my own story at the age of 17 when a reporter showed up on my doorstep with the Norman Rockwell painting which depicted my walk. Until that moment, I thought my experience in 1960 was contained to my own neighborhood, in my own community, on my own street. I questioned if it really even mattered at all. But finally, seeing this painting, now I understood my role in history, and it didn't come from the textbooks used to teach me that very same history, unfortunately. The truth is that rarely do children of color or immigrants see themselves in these textbooks we are forced to use. I write because I want them to understand the contributions their ancestors have made to our great country, whether that contribution was made as slaves or volunteers. My books are written to inspire a new generation to contribute to building this great country for indeed there is much work to be done.

So I say if we are going to have a conversation about banning books, then I say that conversation is long overdue. Let's have it, but it must include all books. If we are to ban books from being too truthful, then surely we must ban those books that distort or omit the truth. I do empathize with parents who are faced with answering questions that they do not feel equipped to answer. Remember, my parents once stood in those very same shoes.

Even when my own grandson at seven came to me with a book about the United States presidents, their names and their faces, asking me, "Mommy, do you have to be white to be President?" As a grandparent, that truth was hard for me to look at. I had to be creative in my response while also being truthful because my grandson needed to feel good about the person he sees in the mirror as well. My response was, no, of course not. You don't have to be white to be President. They are waiting on you. You can be the first Black president of the United States. That held him at bay for a while.

So you see, I encourage parents and teachers to be creative, without lying of course, because our children deserve the truth. The truth is pure. The truth is good. And we all know the saying the truth shall set us free. As I stated in my 2014 TED Talks, teachers should be given the flexibility to teach. We must untie the hands of these very qualified educators. Books celebrate—

Mr. RASKIN. Ms. Bridges, forgive me, we are just over the time, but I am going to come right to you with my questioning, and I hope you will be able to complete the thought, if that is all right.

Ms. BRIDGES. Yes.

Mr. RASKIN. So, we will now begin member questioning, and I will go right to you to finish that point and then I want to ask you another question. So please be as brief as you can be.

Ms. BRIDGES. Books celebrate our shared history and they should not be banned. The integrity of books and history and stories within their pages must be embraced and preserved by all, for all. History is sacred and should not be changed and altered in any way.

In closing, I would like to say the purpose of my books is to extend and expand education to children, all children, no matter their color of the skin. I write to remind children that we should embrace both our truth and our progress and I write to show them that we are truly better together than apart. In order for us to be the United States of America, we have to live up to our name. We, the people, must be united. Our babies, all of them, need to see themselves in our books, particularly in school. Representation doesn't just matter, it's vital, especially in the pages of the books that we teach from. When children read about President Dwight Eisenhower, they should also be able to read about the little six-year-old girl who made a difference during his presidency. That little girl was me, Ruby Bridges, and I am proud of my story as are thousands and thousands of kids, not just in this country, but around the world.

Mr. RASKIN. Well, thank you so much. I am holding up right now the famous Norman Rockwell painting, the rendition of it that is in your book, which is so wonderful and is indeed iconic.

Your book has been objected by the people who want to censor your book because they say it may make white children feel uncom-

fortable, which struck me as just bizarre given that you have a beautiful tribute to the teacher you love the most, I take it, Mrs. Henry, with her picture and she was white. You have a picture of you with a bunch of kids who are white friends, a picture of John Steinbeck who wrote a beautiful essay about you, a tribute to Eleanor Roosevelt and so on. But I guess they were rubbed the wrong way by this. It must be the most clean-cut looking photo I have ever seen of a racist protester, "We won't go to school with Negroes." And I imagine they had a search far and wide to find the use of that N-word as opposed to the other one.

But what is your reaction to those people who say your book doesn't belong in school libraries or doesn't belong in a curriculum about the civil rights period because it might make some white kids feel uncomfortable? Do you think it will make white kids feel uncomfortable and what is your response to that?

Ms. BRIDGES. My response to that is that I have thousands and thousands of kids that write to me constantly, who lift up my books and talk about how they have learned so much from my own story. I believe that, yes, there are some parents who might find the truth very hard to look at. As I mentioned in my talk, I understand that, but we cannot hide the truth from our kids. It is history, and history is sacred and we shouldn't change or alter it in anyway.

Mr. RASKIN. Well, thank you for writing this beautiful book, "Ruby Bridges Goes to School", and thank you for defending everybody's academic and intellectual freedom.

I want to come next to Ms. Hull and Ms. Berg. Ms. Hull, you are a librarian. Ms. Berg, you are a teacher. And first I would wonder if you can concretely tell us what has been your experience of this new wave of attempts to ban books, censor books, challenge books, and so on. How has it affected you in your work? Ms. Hull, you can start.

Ms. HULL. Thank you. I think it all stems from a misunderstanding of what the purpose of libraries are and what librarians can do, and how books end up on shelves. If those who are upset could understand the collection policy, development, and all the pieces that go into curating those collections. I think a lot of the misunderstandings could be avoided.

Mr. RASKIN. Great, and Ms. Berg.

Ms. BERG. Yes. And so to my experience as a classroom teacher, it has not really changed anything because these books that are being banned are choice. They are not being forced on any student. They are books in the library. The curriculum is very different from the books that exist in the library. So the thing is, you can decide for your own child not to have them read the book. You don't get to make that choice for every other child in my school, in my school district, or in the Nation. And, in fact, we all had a commonality in "The Great Gatsby", which is a book on the curriculum we are all currently reading. Even Lilly is, I think, missing a quiz on it today. So, there are two very different sets of books when you are talking about a classroom curriculum and a library for choice.

Mr. RASKIN. Very nice. My time is up, but, Lilly, I am happy to write you a note if you need one. That might help, I am not sure.

I am going to come now to Mr. Donalds for his five minutes of questioning.

Mr. DONALDS. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Witnesses, thanks for being here. I appreciate it.

By way of background. I served in Florida's legislature. I was a chair of two education subcommittees. I wrote legislation about providing people who live within a county the ability to review all material, whether it is classroom or library material, and that all taxpayers, whether they are parents or reside in a county, should have an ability to review that material and examine it because they are the ones that pay for it. Ms. Berg, I know you are Virginia. Ms. Hull, I know you are Pennsylvania. I will describe for you the procurement process in Florida.

Any material, whether it is in the library or in the classroom, is actually approved by the State Board of Education. The State Board of Education goes through their material procurement. They give a list of what they view as being responsible material for the school system. That list then goes down to the school districts. School district administrators review the list. They provide a list of what they feel should be acquired. The school board then votes on the recommendations from the administrators in order to provide the dollars to actually purchase those materials. And that is what actually ends up in the classroom or in the library. There might be a slight variation of that with the library, but, by and large, the administrators bring a list of materials to be acquired, school boards vote on them, and that is how they show up. Is that true?

Ms. BERG. Yes, to my knowledge.

Ms. HULL. It is a little different in Pennsylvania. There is a lot more local control.

Mr. DONALDS. OK. Fair enough. That is fair. Well, can we at least agree for the premise of what we are discussing that school boards are the ones that authorize purchases?

Ms. HULL. Yes.

Mr. DONALDS. Does the school board have the legal authority and the taxing authority to decide what goes in and out of libraries and classrooms?

Ms. HULL. It is my understanding that school board policy places the superintendent in a position to make those and delegate those decisions.

Mr. DONALDS. Does the elected school board have a responsibility to decide on the funding necessary to either acquire material or keep material in classrooms and/or libraries? "yes" or "no."

Ms. BERG. I think in terms of Loudoun County, we also have a board of supervisors, which approves our budget and, again, like Ms. Hull said, it is our superintendent who has decisions in both staffing and allocation of resources.

Mr. DONALDS. So when the material is allowed to come in or there is a decision to remove material, is it just done at the behest of, A, group or is there actually a vote of some body, whether it is the school board, the board of supervisors, or even the decision of the superintendent? Is it that person's decision or that body's decision to remove said material?

Ms. HULL. Not always. Most libraries have weeding processes with the removal of books in a general consensus, especially in non-fiction literature, where we need to keep updated information accu-

rate. And that is a process that is trusted to the experts, the librarians, to be able to do that process without any voting.

Mr. DONALDS. Well, I would argue, Ms. Hull, that at the end of the day, you might decide what is going to sit in a library, but the funding comes from the taxing authority. And if they choose not to fund that purchase, they choose to remove that purchase, the responsibility falls with them. So, if the body politic, the parents that live in a community decide that they find material objectionable and they go to their elected representatives who have authority over the school district and they vote to remove material, wouldn't you say that is the appropriate way of representative democracy is supposed to work?

Here is a better question. Should parents have the ability to have their voices heard about material that they think should be in front of their children, whether it is mandatory or whether it is optional? Do you think parents should have that ability to voice their opinions?

Ms. BERG. Yes, absolutely. As I said in my statement, and they do have that right. The books that are being banned or a majority of the books from library, which are complete choice, they are not the books in our curriculum are required reading. You absolutely have a say in what your child should be able to read, but they are no longer coming to us, the professionals, the expert—

Mr. DONALDS. Ms. Berg, I have got one question.

Ms. BERG. Wait. I would like to finish my answer.

Mr. DONALDS. I know but—

Mr. RASKIN. The gentleman has the time.

Mr. DONALDS. I have got 45 seconds. I got to focus this thing.

Ms. BERG. Parents have a say. They don't have a say for every other parent.

Mr. RASKIN. Ms. Berg, you will get a chance.

Mr. DONALDS. I would not say that parents have the right to say for other parents. What I am saying is do parents or a large part of the community at large have an ability to lobby or engage with their elected officials on the local level to decide what's in the room? I would say the answer to that is yes.

Ms. FREEMAN, quick question for you. I understand the situation that you laid out with your child. I have three sons. I could completely understand what you and your spouse are having to deal with, go through, explain. Support your child, completely understand that. If the material was not in your child's library, would you be able to still acquire that material through Amazon, through Barnes & Noble's, or anywhere else?

Ms. FREEMAN. Personally me, yes, but not every parent has that opportunity to do that or every child feels safe enough and has been—

Mr. DONALDS. And I think this is important.

Mr. RASKIN. The gentleman's time is expired, but you can finish.

Mr. DONALDS. I mean, Ms. Freeman, I appreciate your answer. The point I am really trying to make is, is that we have many parents who have very different objectives and they all should be respected in this discussion. So to make the argument that books are being banned when they are going through the legal course of action to talk to their representatives, I think is very hyperbolic and

is not actually correct about the process that is being used to decide what materials are in or out of the classroom.

With that I yield back. Thank you for the leeway, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. RASKIN. Yes, you bet. Mr. Donalds, I would also just ask you to read page 59 in my book, *We the Students about Board of Education v. PICO*, which dealt with just precisely the process you are talking about, but where the Supreme Court still said you can't strip books from public school libraries because someone disagrees with the viewpoint or the content there. But check it out.

All right. Let's see now. Ms. Wasserman Schultz, you are recognized for five minutes.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And shifting away from process for a moment, I am going to read some excerpts from the book, which is a Pulitzer Prize-winning book called "Maus" where some characters speak in broken English about anti-Semitism in this graphic novel account of the Holocaust. And so the excerpts go as follows: "The mother is always told so, be careful. A Jew will catch you to bag and eat you. So they talked to their children. It was very hard there for the Jews, terrible: synagogues burned, Jews beaten with no reason, whole towns pushing out all Jews," each story worse than the other.

Look, we know that bigotry is learned, but when children access worlds like this outside their own, we know it can also be unlearned. When a Tennessee School District pulled "Maus" from its eighth grade curriculum, it mirrored a national wave to ban so-called objectionable material from schools. White nationalism, anti-Semitism, and racism are on the rise, but purging books which candidly confront the genocide of 6 million Jews will only breed more ignorance fueled hate. "Maus" author Art Spiegelman said: It's as if the Tennessee School Board wants to "Teach a nicer Holocaust."

Ms. Hull, books were removed from your library shelves overnight. My question is, targeting books like "Maus" sends what signal to students, in your opinion?

Ms. HULL. It is my opinion that when books are removed, especially without conversation, without going through a process that includes all voices, out of concern to parents that of students and experts that students are erased, they feel that their identities are not as valued in the school and outside the school walls. It is also my opinion that when books like "Maus", when books like "All Are Welcome" are removed, that not only our community, but the teachers, the school community itself doesn't value students for who they are or what they might feel.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you. These book bans coincide with spikes in anti LGBTQ+ attitudes and legislation where schools and libraries are the battlefield. Ms. Freeman, as a mother, what message does it send to your daughter and other LGBTQ+ students when books reflecting their identities and experiences are pulled from their library shelves?

Ms. FREEMAN. It is sending a message that they are not welcome and they are not seen. And it is also encouraging this behavior of, you know, bullying, sending a message that it is OK to treat LGBTQ individuals in a negative way. That is the kind of message it is sending that they are not welcome in schools. Thank you.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you. Thank you. Censoring LGBTQ+ books in class discussions tells these students that their identities are shameful or to be feared. And as a mother of three children myself who attended Florida public schools, I am frightened by the suppressive forces that are taking hold there. It is being challenged, but Florida's Don't Say Gay law would, "prohibit any discussion about sexual orientation or gender identity in certain grade levels." So if you think the book bans and pulling from curriculum is bad now, just wait till this is fully implemented. God forbid. That is a law you expect to find in Putin's Russia, not America.

And last, Ms. Berg, if Virginia were to pass such a law, would that change your day-to-day life as a teacher?

Ms. BERG. Yes. It changed my life as a teacher because it changes the lives of my students. And already I have seen with the Don't Say Gay Bill in Florida, it is having repercussions on the mental health of LGBTQIA students across the country because they see what's happening. They see the writing on the wall. And I had a student say to me, "I would rather kill myself than not be allowed to be who I am." That is absolutely affecting me as a teacher because I carry that with me.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. And just to wrap up, and I am going to hold "Maus" up again, another excerpt from this book. "People haven't changed. Maybe they need a newer, bigger Holocaust." We have an obligation to ensure this passage from "Maus" remains just that, a line from a book. But if we censor our unpleasant history and deny who we really are, that line of fiction may someday be a frightening new reality. And I want to just close with thanking Ms. Bridges for her perseverance for staying in the fight, for making sure that she gave meaning. Even though she didn't understand it when she was six years old, that she gave full meaning to what her parents did for her and for all school children, all across this country.

Thank you so much. I yield back.

Mr. RASKIN. The gentlelady yields back. Thank you for your questioning, Ms. Wasserman Schultz.

Now Mr. Biggs is recognized for his five minutes of questioning.

Mr. BIGGS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am going to approach the portion of our titled hearing that talks about academic censorship. And so with that, I would ask that we watch a videotape that my staff has prepared.

Mr. RASKIN. Without objection.

Mr. BIGGS. Thank you.

[Video shown.]

Mr. BIGGS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman to let us show that video.

Mr. RASKIN. By all means.

Mr. BIGGS. One of the things that I have seen repeatedly, and I will be submitting some stuff for the record. I will just save it till after I question some witnesses. A CBP, Customs and Border Patrol, agent showed up at an invited event on the University of Arizona campus in March 2019. He was attacked, and this presentation was disrupted and the type of speech used against him was outrageous, calling him "murder patrol," "KKK," "anti-campus," that type of thing. Kyrsten Sinema, actually senior senator from

Arizona, who is also an adjunct professor at ASU, recently, last October as a matter of fact, was teaching her class. She went to the restroom. She was followed into the restroom, into the stall, and was raided by students who were upset by a vote she had taken in her role as senator. Recently, UVA, the *Cavalier Daily* put out a piece saying former Vice President Mike Pence, it would be dangerous for him to come and just speak on campus. *Concerned Faculty* published a counterpoint to that, which is included in my documents that I will be submitting. In 2021, 111 scholars were targeted because of not even political ideology, just expressing thoughts contrary or heterodox to the entire left wing campus at these universities.

I am almost at time already. I just have to say I was 40 with six kids. I had worked at the United Nations, and I went back to get a graduate degree at a local university. And even I felt cowed actually expressing my true opinion because you understand one thing when you are in graduate school: the professor has your future in their hands. And if you don't acquiesce to what they are saying or at least solve their point of view sufficiently, you don't get welcomed into the club.

So I will go to Mr. Pidluzny. The First Amendment would apply to state institutions like public colleges and universities. Is that right? And you will need the mic on. Can you explain the importance of free speech in our society, particularly on college campuses and the dangers to civil society where we stifle that free speech?

Mr. PIDLUZNY. Absolutely. As Chairman Raskin pointed out, we need to learn to tolerate the speech that we abhor. That is the only way to rebuild a civil discourse. And the only way for that to occur is for us to feel like we can talk to people who disagree with us fervently to learn that they are people of goodwill who often want the same good things for society, but just have different ways of getting there.

Mr. BIGGS. And can you provide some examples where university administrators at public institutions have sought to constrain speech in a way that runs afoul of the First Amendment's protection for freedom of speech?

Mr. PIDLUZNY. I mean, absolutely. They do it in dozens and dozens of ways. One example is overbroad speech policies where basically offensive speech is forbidden. If offensive speech is forbidden, there are a lot of things you cannot talk about, basically anything that is controversial in our sort of social lives. And so they use bias response teams to then enforce these, right, which allows any member of the campus community to file a complaint. The process to investigate the complaint is then deliberately burdensome, right? So, I think sometimes police officers are actually on these committees as well, which are called to have a discussion with the dean. Often it goes public. They publicize it. There may be social media involved for other students who are bystanders and the goal is to destroy the reputation of the conservative student.

Mr. BIGGS. Thank you. I know my time is expired. May I give a—

Mr. RASKIN. Well, the problem is we are about, they are calling votes in just a few minutes. I want to try to get at least another person in.

Mr. BIGGS. OK.

Mr. RASKIN. We are going to do a second round. So I may—

Mr. BIGGS. OK. I may not be here for a second round. Are you content with me just giving you a stack of these documents and submitting it for the record?

Mr. RASKIN. Oh, sure. By all means. By unanimous consent.

Mr. BIGGS. Thank you.

Mr. RASKIN. No objection.

Mr. RASKIN. Mr. Raskin. No objection. And now I am going to come to Ms. Tlaib for her five minutes of questioning.

Ms. TLAIB. Thank you so much, Mr. Raskin. Hi, Lilly. How are you? You know, I am a mother of two, raising, you know, two Muslim boys in our country. And it has been very difficult. But, you know, Ms. Bridges, I want to thank you so much because what you said really resonated with me. I know I get emotional every time I think of my two boys. You know, our children, they just simply want to exist as they are. They want to be loved. They want to feel human. You know, there is so much dehumanization happening just even at a young age, and they may want to feel like they belong.

And it is so hard because I think my colleague, Wasserman Schultz, was right, and there are some things that we just have to understand that even some of this stuff that we just don't want to see, right, that it also has to be available so that we know just the impact and the detriment that it can have on our society. You know, I can't imagine, I mean, 850 books, Chairman, have been challenged in Texas. Sixty-two percent of them address LGBTQ+ issues. Eight percent address race and racism. When we have an issue in our country, anti-Blackness exists in our country, we should be constantly right now working and addressing it because it is a disease that kills, if by suicide or by violence, and so much more.

You know, Ms. Bridges, something that you testified that when you were in school, you didn't see any of those stories, the images. I want to tell you, you know, my son saw this image. He had heard me talking about it. There was this image in *USA Today* depicting Muslims as like Nazis. It was awful. It was like a skeleton image. And it said "Allahu Akbar," which means "God is great," on the form. And, you know, I am talking to his dad and I am just like, oh my God, if people see this, they are going to want to kill us, right?

My son walks in, Ms. Bridges, and you know what he says? He goes, "Mamma, don't worry." He was 9. He goes, "Don't worry. If somebody asks if I am Muslim, I will lie and tell them I am not." Ms. Freeman that devastated me that my child didn't feel like he could exist because he's hearing me talk about these things. But also I want him to be able to pick up a book and see somebody of his faith or somebody that had that same lived experiences of being Muslim in America or being a child of a Palestinian father or a mother who grew up, you know, in Detroit in the most beautiful, Blackest city in the country.

So, this is a really, really hard hearing. I mean, I love you Raskin, but you always have the most difficult hearings, Chairman. And I just, you know, I have so many questions, but I just hope

my colleagues do understand the importance and the human impact. You know, you have a huge role, Ms. Hull. You know, I grew up with the Bookmobile, if you remember the Bookmobile, and I didn't speak English when I started school, and I was able to get up there and get the book that I needed. And I loved it because, of course, it was a Latina that was there that helped me understand, oh wow, you know, brown girls are in books, you know. And it was also the teacher that I was really shy, if you can imagine me being shy, Ms. Berg. But my first debate hearing, I got up and choked, but it was an amazing teacher, Mrs. Marshall, who showed me that I had a voice.

This is so difficult because it is not just about the books, right? It is about being human in our country and stop politicizing it. We need to see ourselves in our country. And so I just look forward to the day when our children can read the history, right, in a class about the sad, hateful bigots, who tried to drag America backward, and I hope it inspires them to also be fighters like Lilly and like the witnesses here today, who stopped them dead in their tracks. I am with you.

I just want you all to know, I really appreciate your courage being here. I could ask you all kinds of questions, but I feel like I am speaking to the choir. But I am happy that we are doing this because I think bringing it to the halls of Congress makes it more real and at least they can see some of us do see them and we do see them as human beings.

Thank you, and I yield.

Mr. RASKIN. Well, thank you for that beautiful, moving statement, Ms. Tlaib. What an honor it is to get to serve with her.

I am going to ask everybody's indulgence and patience one last time. We have to go vote. Nobody has been more patient than the great ranking member of this committee, Nancy Mace. She is going to come back and as soon as we get back. She is going to get to do the questioning. But we have a lot more questions for you. We have to get more to say, so please hang tough, everybody. And, Ms. Tlaib, we can give you a ride, if you want one. Thanks.

[Recess.]

Mr. RASKIN. Back to order. We resume with questioning from our distinguished ranking member, Ms. Mace of South Carolina.

Ms. MACE.

[Presiding.] Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you all for your patience today.

Ms. Ruby Bridges great to have you, someone who is such a historical figure in the civil rights movement here today. We want to thank you for your time and for everyone who's here today. I know it took probably most of the time out of your day, and out of work and school, and everything. And I appreciate Mr. Chairman.

I do have a unanimous consent that I want to enter into the record when this is over. And if we are waving books around, here is mine, "In the Company of Men: A Woman at the Citadel", that has not been banned yet, as far as I know, and probably can get it used for \$1 on eBay.

Ms. MACE. But nonetheless, I had some questions I wanted to followup on from my colleagues earlier today. And, Ms. Berg, I want to thank you for your time today. I have a few "yes" or "no"

questions that I want to ask the panelists this afternoon. And the first one, Ms. Berg, does a state superintendent of education have a role in defining curriculum for students of that state? “Yes” or “no.”

Ms. BERG. So, that is more than a “yes” or “no” question?

Ms. MACE. “Yes” or “no.” Does the State Superintendent of Education have a role in determining the curriculum—

Ms. BERG. That is not how curriculum works.

Ms. MACE. What about the school board? So do school boards have a say in shaping curriculum in state’s education?

Ms. BERG. That is not how curriculum works.

Ms. MACE. What about parents? Do parents have a say in curriculum in their kids’ education? “Yes” or “no.”

Ms. BERG. I wrote a curriculum. That is not how it works, how the approval process works.

Ms. MACE. OK. So, we don’t want them to say “yes” or “no.” So I believe that—

Ms. BERG. Well, because it is not a “yes” or “no” question.

Ms. MACE. OK. It is a “yes” or “no” in a democracy and in determining the outcome of education. As a daughter of a retired school-teacher, as a parent, single working mom of two kids, I do believe that myself and their dad have a say in the outcome and the curriculum of my kids’ education. Ms. Hull, thank you for being here today. And thank you for bringing your experience as a librarian with us this afternoon. So, are the only libraries in the United States school libraries? Are those the only public libraries in the U.S.?

Ms. HULL. No.

Ms. MACE. So, are there libraries that maybe municipalities, states, or counties also create in different states across the country?

Ms. HULL. I believe they are known as public libraries.

Ms. MACE. Right. So, is there anything that prevents a student from going to a public library if they can’t find a book they want to read in their school library?

Ms. HULL. Transportation would be the main one.

Ms. MACE. OK. Are they allowed to go to a public library? Are students allowed to go a public library or only school libraries if they have transportation?

Ms. HULL. That would be a parent decision.

Ms. MACE. OK. Are there other places where students or parents can get books, maybe a bookstore, like a physical bookstore, like a Barnes & Noble’s bookstore?

Ms. HULL. Perhaps, if they have the financial means.

Ms. MACE. Can parents buy books online, like from Amazon?

Ms. HULL. Perhaps, if they have the financial means.

Ms. MACE. Can you go to a place like Goodwill and buy a book for less than \$1 or maybe even get it for free?

Ms. HULL. Goodwill selection is certainly not as expansive as those carry—

Ms. MACE. Or other bookstores? So, what you are saying is there is more than one opportunity for a student or a parent to get a book to their kid’s liking. It is not just they are not only limited

to public schools. They can get a book from a lot of different places, even in a coffee shop if they wanted to, right?

Ms. HULL. Yes.

Ms. MACE. And you mentioned in your testimony earlier today about students having safe spaces to read. Is a classroom a safe space to read?

Ms. HULL. I believe that depends on the classroom.

Ms. MACE. OK. What about school libraries? Are school libraries safe places to read?

Ms. HULL. I also think that depends on the individual library space.

Ms. MACE. Are kids safe to read when they are at home?

Ms. HULL. Not always.

Ms. MACE. Are most kids, do you think, safe to read while they are at home?

Ms. HULL. I do not have the numbers to represent that.

Ms. MACE. OK. And then I had some additional questions. If a student wanted to get an LGBTQ book that wasn't in a school library, could they get it at a public library? Would it be available in a public library?

Ms. HULL. If they had the transportation and means to get there.

Ms. MACE. But would a LGBTQ book be available in a public library?

Ms. HULL. Of course.

Ms. MACE. OK. Or a book of any other nature. And I don't have much time left. I want to get to Mr. Pidluzny. I apologize if I am not saying your name right. And you talked extensively about free speech, about free speech on college campuses, for example. There are a lot of examples of censored speech. Even people who are against censoring want to censor people because they don't believe in their beliefs. Like, there are some people out there that want to ban me from going on Fox News because they don't agree with me. But we are going to not stop doing that, and in even some cases, people are attacked for their beliefs. I have had my house spray painted last summer by someone who disagreed with my political beliefs. I have had my car keyed for the same thing. And sometimes on college campuses students don't have the freedom of speech. So, can you explain to us why freedom of speech is so important in the United States of America?

Mr. PIDLUZNY. Absolutely. Many reasons. I talked about the importance of expressing different viewpoints to learn about other people's goodwill. You have to come in contact with those things already. Universities are also places where you have political scientists, economists. If everybody can freely explore issues, we are going to refine public policy, and the student leaders in those classrooms are going to learn how to solve today's problems a lot better. And if faculty are afraid to talk about things like racial inequality and do so in a truly wide ranging way, we are not going to come up with the new solutions that the country needs.

Ms. MACE. Thank you. And before I run out of time, Chairman Raskin, I did want to ask unanimous consent to enter the following article into the record from my local hometown paper, the Post and Courier, regarding a college that banned a political club, a non-partisan political club. A lawsuit was filed, and the college had to pay

the students' legal fees in \$20,000. And this article details how the local college tried to deny access to funding and meeting spaces on a college campus for a political group that had no political affiliation. And after that lawsuit, the college changed its policy regarding how they treat students and freedom of speech.

Thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. RASKIN.

[Presiding.] Without objection. Thank you for your questioning.

We now recognize the distinguished gentlelady from the District of Columbia, Ms. Norton, for her five minutes of questioning.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

This is a very important hearing. Every challenge to a book or conversation in a classroom drains valuable resources from schools that are already stretched thin. Reviewing a challenged book imposes hours of additional labor on teachers and librarians and administrators. And then those hours could perhaps be better spent working with students or creating lessons or not trying to look at what books should be in the library.

Ms. Hull, as a school librarian as well as a leader for librarians in your area, you have played a large role in reviewing books that were being challenged by parents and school administrators. How much time does it take to review a single challenged book and what extra administrative steps do you have to undertake?

Ms. HULL. So, I will answer the first part of your question about timing. Generally the challenge process happens between 2 and 3 weeks and the time out of the classroom, out of the library, the instructional time is around 1 to 2 hours per day during that 2 to 3 week period.

Ms. NORTON. So that is time that is not spent on teaching or with education.

Ms. HULL. Correct. And then did you have a second part?

Ms. NORTON. What other things could you be doing with that time, for example, to support students if you weren't reviewing these challenges?

Ms. HULL. Sure. I would be able to spend time doing what I was hired to do and that involves a variety of activities, but most importantly, it keeps the students at the center. So, often I'm working with students in small groups, in one-on-one situations. I am also working with teachers and co-teaching lessons. I also have a roster of my own and teaching classes to students directly. All of that on top of maintaining a collection and then sometimes having to support that collection.

Ms. NORTON. These book bans, along with related bills aimed at censoring school discussions, are taking their tolls on teachers as well. My own mother was a teacher. I understand how much work that involves. Ms. Berg, I believe, you have spoken before about facing increased complaints from parents. How long does it take for you to address each complaint and what types of issues are parents raising in these complaints?

Ms. BERG. Yes, an increased complaint recently and depending on the issue or if there is an issue with a student, it is phone calls home. All of the meetings that we have with parents have to take place out of school hours, out of contract hours before or after school, or oftentimes on my planning block, which is where I usu-

ally try to grade or actually plan the lessons I am going to teach. So, one complaint can be anywhere from 3 to 4 hours, and that is out of contract time for these meetings.

Ms. NORTON. What types of issues are parents raising in these complaints?

Ms. BERG. Again, like I said in my statement, it is a really sad state of affairs that this divisiveness has really kind of cut the communication between parents and teachers. A lot of our parents in Loudoun County specifically just go straight to the school board and don't actually come to the teacher with their questions or looking for an alternative text. A lot of it is just that they, you know, hear this rhetoric in the news about CRT or LGBTQIA policies and they don't want that discussed in class, but they never actually come to us, the teacher, to discuss what we are doing with our lessons in class regarding those issues.

Ms. NORTON. Ms. Berg, I think the committee would be interested in knowing how these challenges affect you personally as a teacher? What could you tell us about that?

Ms. BERG. I love teaching. It is my just life's work, my passion. Like I said, I wrote a curriculum, created a class. I love the students I get to work with. And this past December, I was putting together a resume and ready to quit my job because of what is going on and the constant questioning of my professionalism, my care for my students. Like Ms. Hull said, they are always at the center of what we do. That is why we got into this profession because we care about students, and it is demoralizing. And we right now have a shortage of teachers in this Nation, and it is only going to get worse, and that is going to do damage to the education system as a whole. That is what these book bans, these challenges, this rhetoric, that is what it is doing. It is destroying education.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you, Ms. Norton, for your excellent questioning there. I think that a couple members are on their way back, Ms. Pressley and Mr. Jordan. So, let me just ask a few questions I had to sort of everybody and we could just go down the panel there.

I think it is easy for us to recognize when something's actual censorship, you know, in violation of the Supreme Court's decision in Board Of Education *v. Pico*, when schools are saying we don't like Catcher in the Rye, and we don't like Native Son, and they offended some pressure group and we are going to remove them, or in the higher ed context, we are not going to hire someone who teaches critical race theory or we are not going to hire someone who's a conservative or a liberal or what have you. That is easy. But a number of you have talked about the somewhat more ethereal question of the climate of what the feelings are like, and that is much harder to put our finger on that.

You know, I think one of our colleagues before said, you know, even as, I think, a 40-year-old who was involved in politics and a graduate student, he still felt he couldn't really express his feelings about something and we know a lot of LGBTQ people also feel, well, maybe nobody has said I can't talk about my sexual orientation. Maybe they haven't passed Don't Say Gay yet in my state, but I still feel stifled about it.

How do we cultivate the values of tolerance and acceptance such that we don't have the informal mechanisms of marginalizing people? And maybe we can just start with Ms. Berg and, you know, work our way down to Mr. Pidluzny.

Ms. BERG. Yes, absolutely. Mr. Pidluzny and I were actually having a great conversation, and I said the one thing that I foster my class was it being a safe space, is the ability to have these conversations regardless of your viewpoint. And I asked students, you know, what do you want to discuss, and it is always these major issues that are going on outside in our world. And I say one rule, one rule only. If you want to talk about this, you show respect. We are not here to all agree with each other. We are here to listen and you have to listen as much as you talk. And that is truly what is giving me hope for the future because my teenagers can do it. I hope we can, you know, talk and listen and just respect one another because you want them to have this access to the conversation to, again, hopefully change our future.

Mr. RASKIN. And you clearly model those values of respect and tolerance, so, thank you for that. Yes, Mr. Pidluzny.

Mr. PIDLUZNY. So, I think every constituency has something to do. Administrators need to tear down their bias response teams and they need to fix the policies, but they should also model a tolerance of other viewpoints. So presidents and

[inaudible] should go to talks on every side of the aisle, and they should make sure that we are inviting speakers to campus to discuss topics on every side of the aisle.

Faculty need to hire faculty they disagree with, right? The biggest problem we see with faculty search committees is that they are duplicating themselves. And so political science and philosophy and literature, they become basically viewpoint monocultures, and we need to help students understand the importance of free and open discourse and of civil discourse. And so I think we need to incorporate training modules into first year seminars. Faculty need to remind students that, you know, that this is a place for free and open debate and that they shouldn't be using social media to shame people who are expressing disparate viewpoints.

Mr. RASKIN. Yes, I appreciate that. Ms. Freeman.

Ms. FREEMAN. Thank you. I think Ms. Berg said a lot of what I was going to say, but I think we do better when we listen to each other's stories. And these stories are in the books that we read in the classroom, in the school libraries. And with me, you heard when I talked about the LGBTQ books, particularly for my family and learning about the people that we need to work with, whether it be in the school, in the community, even when you get out into the real world. So, I just think it is important that we do better when we know about each other, all of us, and it is within our books that we learn about each other listening to each other. Thank you.

Mr. RASKIN. Great. And, Ms. Hull before I come to Mr. Jordan for his questioning.

Ms. HULL. Sure, I will echo everyone's thoughts. And then what I'm hearing is that we need to build tolerance and we need to build empathy. And how we do that is by starting through literature and we allow our youngest learners to be comfortable when they are

uncomfortable, and being able to feel like they can ask questions and express different viewpoints in ways that have been modeled through even age appropriate children's stories all the way up through novels at the high school level.

Mr. RASKIN. Very good. Well, thank you all for your thoughtful answers to that question.

And I am going to yield to Mr. Jordan for his five minutes.

Mr. JORDAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Dr. Pidluzny, did I get that close? I apologize.

Mr. PIDLUZNY. That is it.

Mr. JORDAN. All right. I will call you "Dr." from now on. I think I will just stick with that. Right now, where is the biggest concerns about free speech actually happening?

Mr. PIDLUZNY. I think the two biggest problems are a lack of viewpoint diversity. As John Stuart Mill explains, it is not enough to have free speech or free expression rights. You need to be being presented with ideas that challenge you to think outside of your comfort zone or outside of the box.

Mr. JORDAN. I guess I'm asking, was that more so on college campuses or in—

Mr. PIDLUZNY. Well, I think the situation on college campuses is much worse.

Mr. JORDAN. Yes, much worse. We got what, we got safe spaces and, you know, where you can go and you can't be triggered or whatever, and people can't say that you got free speech zones.

Mr. PIDLUZNY. Yes. Ms. Berg and I were actually just talking about the fact that a lot of the things you put trigger warnings on in college or a lot of the things that students are trying to remove from their curriculum, like depictions of rape and classical literature, those are the things that they are talking about in middle school and in high school.

Mr. JORDAN. Well, so, I guess, and when it comes to, you know, elementary or even primary education, that is about what is appropriate for kids. That is a different debate than college campuses, adults' free speech. Is that right?

Mr. PIDLUZNY. Absolutely, right. So I think it is perfectly reasonable for K-12 to ask, are these resources well-tailored to our educational objectives? And so you can never remove a book to restrict access to political ideas or social perspectives. However, and this is from Justice Blackmun writing in Pico. First Amendment principles would allow a school board to refuse to make a book available to students because it contains offensive language or because it is psychologically or intellectually inappropriate for the age group or even perhaps because the ideas it advances are manifestly inimical to the public welfare.

Mr. JORDAN. Yes, because moms and dads don't like that either. That is a different animal. On a college campus, can a safe space and a free speech zone be at the same location?

Mr. PIDLUZNY. Well, they have different objectives, so I would say no. But the free speech zone is itself problematic because it suggests that there is only one part of the campus.

Mr. JORDAN. Exactly, because it seems to me, where is the free speech zone supposed to be?

Mr. PIDLUZNY. Yes. Well, I mean, typically it is in the quad somewhere, some states are actually forcing—

Mr. JORDAN. It seems to me the First Amendment is the First Amendment. A free speech zone should be just about everywhere.

Mr. PIDLUZNY. Well, absolutely.

Mr. JORDAN. It should be everywhere.

Mr. PIDLUZNY. But for time, place, manner restrictions, or insightful speech, absolutely.

Mr. JORDAN. Sure. We understand that. I remember we had some hearings a few years ago. We had Ben Shapiro and Adam Carolla and other people come in and we had college professors come in. Tell me about these bias response teams. I remember that from a few years back.

Mr. PIDLUZNY. I think they are one of the most insidious things that are happening on college campuses. There are hundreds of them out there. Basically, they look different on every campus. They often include police officers. They often include student life administrators.

Basically what happens is you create some kind of portal, and students are encouraged to anonymously make complaints about things that are said or done, and this triggers some kind of an investigation. Sometimes the bias response team can refer for punishment or even enact punishment. But the design of the process is that it would be reputation damaging and onerous, so that any reasonable, objectively reasonable student would want to avoid this. How do you avoid it? Well, you avoid it by saying anything that anyone could take offense at.

Mr. JORDAN. Yes.

Mr. PIDLUZNY. And that is the problem. And that is the point.

Mr. JORDAN. You don't want someone to report you to the bias response team. It chills everyone's speech on campus.

Mr. PIDLUZNY. Well, you can't even watch Ben Shapiro on your dorm, right?

Mr. JORDAN. Yes, exactly. One of the things that I am concerned about is this term "misinformation." Misinformation gets used, it seems to me, someone is, however someone defines misinformation. If you engage in misinformation, then that speech is not allowed to happen. And I am very concerned about that because I actually think that one of the biggest purveyors, maybe the biggest purveyor of misinformation is the government. Government tells us things all the time that aren't accurate, but somehow if a citizen says something that they are going to get attacked by, I think, often by the left for spreading misinformation.

Mr. PIDLUZNY. Yes. I mean, the very concept of misinformation, the idea that we should be banning that actually flies in the face of the idea of an intellectual marketplace where if you have dialog between different ideas, the ones that are true are going to rise to the top, and the ones that are simply false will rise to the bottom. So, for example, we didn't do a whole lot of scientific discussion of masks and how effective masks were. All right. We just heard our public health authorities tell us, well, they don't help, and then that they do help, and that they don't help unless they are N95. Well, and the problem with that is it reduces our confidence in government and our public health officials and that is a huge problem.

Mr. JORDAN. Very much so.

Mr. PIDLUZNY. I wish they would have just said we are not totally sure.

Mr. JORDAN. That is not the only example. There are all kinds of examples where the government told us one thing that turned out to be just the opposite. And yet if you question that, you were labeled as the one spreading misinformation and your speech got attacked. So, we got to be very careful with that phenomena as we move forward.

With that, I yield back.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you, Mr. Jordan, for your thoughtful questioning.

And now, Ms. Pressley, it is my honor to recognize you for your five minutes of questioning.

Ms. PRESSLEY. Thank you, Chairman Raskin, and thank you to the first panel of students for sharing your stories and taking action.

Across the country, scholars are calling out, rightfully so, how banning books on race and LGBTQ issues from our schools are impeding their education and their own personal development and growth. Republican book bans target literary classics like "The Bluest Eye" and "Beloved" by Toni Morrison, the first Black woman to win the Nobel Prize in literature, because the novels discuss racism and slavery, but their focus is not only on works of fiction. In multiple states, Republicans have sought to prohibit students from reading non-fiction and historical recounts because the subject matter tells the truth about racial injustice in America.

Ms. Bridges, you know this all too well. Your book, "This Is Your Time", is on the list of books that Texas Republicans want removed from public schools. And the so-called Moms for Liberty group has launched a campaign in more than 30 states to have one of your children's books, "Ruby Bridges Goes to School", banned because it makes students feel uncomfortable. Ms. Bridges, what do you say to the parents who do not want their children to hear your story or seek to exclude the truth of racism that you and your family experienced firsthand?

Ms. BRIDGES. Well, as I said earlier, I believe that history is sacred, and none of us have the right to change or alter history in any way. Well, I have been taught that we need to know our history to know where we are going. Just thinking about everything that I have heard this morning, it seems to me that we have so many of these books of choice, that the reason why is that our young people cannot find their stories and contribution, sacrifices to this country in the books that we do not have a choice in. And that is in our textbooks.

So it would seem to me that these books of choice is even more crucial that we have them so that our young people in schools have a place to go to find their stories and their contributions to this country. I mean, at some point in time we may be calling on these young people to serve and defend this country. And as my father felt back during the Korean War, I would think that this country would want to lift them up. Let those citizens know that we are indeed proud of them because we celebrate their stories, their con-

tributions. So, I think that these books are proven to be even more crucial.

Ms. PRESSLEY. Thank you.

Ms. BRIDGES. And shouldn't be banned.

Ms. PRESSLEY. Thank you, Ms. Bridges. And to your point about called on to be the future defenders, you know, in communities throughout the country, Black students of all ages continue to face white supremacist violence just for trying to access quality education. I mean, recent threats on our HBCUs are a stark example of this in fact. So how do you think the removal of books like yours will affect this young generation of students who might not be aware of the struggle to fight segregation in America? How does it affect their sense of purpose, their agency?

Ms. BRIDGES. Well, I have to, you know, refer back to the thousands and thousands of kids who write me letters and saying how my story has actually helped them to stand up to be brave. So I would have to refer to that. Yes, as I mentioned earlier, the truth is hard to look at, but I do honestly believe that in the long run the truth will set us free.

Ms. PRESSLEY. And thank you so much, Ms. Bridges. These book bans are really no more than a malicious political campaign of erasure, erasure of civil rights history, erasure of LGBTQ equality, erasure of all the hard-fought progress made that allows our babies the chance to learn, and accepting and nurturing classrooms. But, of course, this is not just about knowledge. I could argue that books save lives. I know it saved my own when I was a child and real-time experiencing child abuse and I picked up Maya Angelou's "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" from my school library. And it was the first time, in the midst of all the shame and the fear that I was experiencing, that I knew that I was not alone in the world. So, yes, books expand minds and empower our young people and the place that they take in this world, but I think they save lives.

Ms. BRIDGES. Absolutely.

Ms. PRESSLEY. With that, I yield back.

Mr. RASKIN. Ms. Pressley, thank you for your wonderful questioning. And that is we have come to the end of our representative questioners.

Ms. MACE, did you have any final thoughts you wanted to conclude with?

Ms. MACE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank our witnesses once again for their time today and adhering our witnesses this afternoon and this morning.

I think the idea of censorship is a far more important issue than the issue of state superintendents of education, state boards of education, local county boards of education and parents doing what is legally and rightfully theirs to determine is how their kids are educated in their communities. So, when you look at this issue and you look at some of the censorship that is happening on college campuses, as we heard today from Dr. Pidluzny, it is very difficult to say your name, but thank you for being here today. But that kind of censorship, censorship on social media, that is far more dangerous than what we are hearing, I think, from our witnesses today. And I have experienced it myself, you know, part of the American experiment is being able to have a debate of ideas, to

have this exchange of ideas, and not get attacked for. But we are seeing conservatives and some on the far left and far right being attacked every single day in this country. And the censorship and this erasure is not being applied equally.

I know the Kremlin is tweeting on Twitter right now. You know, we are banning conservatives from Twitter, and yet the Kremlin can still tweet today. And, you know, if you are going to have a standard, apply it equally across all users on social media. And complaining that parents go to school boards to have their voices heard is wrong. Accusing schools as in saying that there is no safe place to go read in the classroom or the library, that should be the safest place to read. And so this is, I think, not an accurate representation of what is truly going on.

But at the same time, we want to have folks, like Ruby Bridges, having her voices heard. There are so many Black voices, so many LGBTQ voices, too, that have the right to be heard at the same time. But the questioning of speech and looking at that from that perspective, even Bernie Sanders, because we have got, I read a story earlier today from Daniel Marans on *Huffington Post*, who is sitting in the room today, quoted Bernie Sanders not too long ago, that people have a right to give their two cents worth, give a speech without fear of violence, intimidation, et cetera. And yet today we have that going on.

We had the end of a 2020 election where mainstream media wouldn't talk about the business that Hunter Biden was doing, even talk about the emails that were on his laptop. And when talk about some of the, I would say allegedly shady work that he was doing and whether or not his father was a part of that and doing that at the tail end of an election. And so we see that every day.

There was some citation earlier about kids not feeling safe because of their LGBTQ status. Mental health, mental issues are up. Depression and anxiety has been up by 25 percent over the last years because of COVID-19. That is a statistic from the World Health Organization. I have seen it in my own family with my own children who have suffered because they were not in school. They were in virtual school. And I have seen some children that haven't been able to get it back. I have seen increase in drug use from kids who don't even have the ability to drive right now. And so when we are having these conversations about anxiety and depression of our students, I hope that we can have a broader discussion of how keeping our kids out of schools has actually harmed them over the last two years.

And I just want to last say it again, Mr. Raskin. Even though we sometimes disagree, we always agree to disagree, and I love the debate that we have in the Civil Rights Subcommittee on Oversight. And I want to thank you all for your time and being here today.

Thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. RASKIN. Well, thank you so much for that excellent conclusion and for making sure you would be here with us today to participate in this. And I have got a few closing thoughts of my own.

First, I want to thank our extraordinary witnesses beginning with the students who were with us on the first panel. But I want to thank Samantha Hull, who is a librarian from the great Lan-

caster County in Pennsylvania, Mindy Freeman, who is appearing from Bucks County, Pennsylvania. And we thank you so much for being with us along with your daughter. And Dr. Jonathan Pidluzny, who is with the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, and Jessica Berg, who is teacher in neighboring Loudoun County, Virginia.

I also was very moved by the testimony and the seriousness with which all of you have approached a really important topic, and I just had a few cleanup thoughts I wanted to advance before we close. One is on the question of the fine old lost art of American heckling. I got heckled yesterday by our colleague Marjorie Taylor Greene on the floor of the House, and totally fine with me. I think they were about to gavel her down or tell her she had to be removed. You know, she was yelling at me, but she left some oxygen and space for me to respond, and I did. And that kind of heckling, you know, if you go back and read the Lincoln-Douglas debates, there is a great compendium of the Lincoln-Douglas debates by a historian named Harold Holzer. But he includes the heckling that took place and people would yell things out, and then Lincoln and Douglas would respond to them, and sometimes it would launch a whole new, you know, discussion between the two of them. That kind of heckling is fine for me. The kind that I think we saw in one of the tapes where people are actually trying to shut people up and shut down the event, that strikes me as not within the spirit of the First Amendment, much less something like we saw on January 6, which was the ultimate act of censorship.

The ultimate expression of cancel culture was what took place on January 6, where 900 people entered this building unlawfully, evading the metal detectors, evading the officers, actually wounding and injuring 160 of our officers, smashing them in the face with baseball bats, and American flags, and Confederate battle flags, and so on. That, to me, was the essence of cancel culture. They were trying to cancel out our whole democracy. On that day they were trying to cancel out the whole Constitution, so I was not happy to see the relatively trivial violence before on the video. I don't think anybody was, you know, wounded or given post-traumatic stress syndrome or killed in that kind of violence, but I wasn't happy to see it. And I am not happy to see a form of heckling which is really just shutting down other people's ability to speak.

The second thing I want to say, and we were about to get through the hearing so well on a bipartisan commitment, the First Amendment, but I did want to respond to my friend, Jim Jordan. I don't know if he's still out there somewhere. I'm sorry that he left the room. But, you know, it is very easy to feel that your group is somehow being unfairly targeted and made a victim. And I have spoken before to the distinguished gentleman from Ohio about this. He seems to believe that conservatives are somehow uniquely the victims of what he calls cancel culture.

We have already heard from some people today—students, teacher, librarian, mom—about the actual attempts to strip books from people's libraries. And we heard from the great Ruby Bridges about the extraordinary and shocking effort to censor her books and remove them from public libraries in an attempt to silence the crit-

ical experience, the formative experience for our lives of the Civil Rights Movement affecting everybody, not just the African-American community, not just the Latino community, the Asian-American community, but the people in the white community, people all across the board. This is the American story.

And so, I guess what I would like to say is I think that we are going to advance the First Amendment values that all of us hold dear, if we can step a little bit beyond our own sense of grievance and indignation, that somehow we are the first people ever to feel the sting of being marginalized. I know that conservatives feel marginalized. I think Oberlin is sometimes mentioned as a school, just like conservatives feel, liberals feel marginalized sometimes at George Mason University, or conservatives can feel marginalized at Wesley perhaps, and liberals can feel marginalized at the University of Chicago. OK. So, let's try to maintain a sense of balance about that, and we can talk about how to improve the climate for everybody. I think it is within the spirit of First Amendment values that we want to give everybody the right to speak, and to participate, and to try to respect them as much as possible, as Ms. Berg said.

And finally is to the point raised by my friend, Ms. Mace. And I think a couple of the other members raised this too. We do have a kind of a tension or a balance in our public schools and, by the way, our public universities too, between individual freedom and democracy. There is no doubt that we have democratic mechanisms like school boards, and state legislatures, and county education superintendents who are involved in the preparation of curriculum. That is a function of democracy. And at the same time, under our First Amendment, the Supreme Court has said and certainly the people feel, our students or teachers don't shed their First Amendment rights at the schoolhouse gate. And so we have to try to reconcile those two values.

All I would say about the current attempt to demonize and vilify people on school boards, teachers, librarians, is they are the democratic culture, along with our PTAs and our parents. They are the people that have been put in by the voters all across America. They are doing a hell of a job, I think. And so just because someone decides that they want to go on a book banning rampage or expedition doesn't mean suddenly that everybody who has been elected to the school boards or everybody who is in an office or everybody who is the head of the PTA, is somehow the enemy of the people. I don't accept that. I think that the teachers, the librarians, the PTA people, the school officials are doing their very best to reconcile all of these values in a democratic society. And the First Amendment is there to protect all of us.

And the Supreme Court, I think, has been real clear about viewpoint discrimination, whether at the higher education level. Check out *Board of Directors v. University of Virginia*, I think it is called, and the *Rosenberger* case, where, no, you can't discriminate against religious student groups that want to get money to publish their newspaper. They have got an equal right to the Republicans, and the Democrats, and the liberals, and the conservatives. Just because you are religious group that is publishing a newspaper doesn't mean you can be discriminated against. But the Supreme

Court has also been equally clear in the K through 12 context. While curriculum materials have to be age appropriate, you can't take books out of the library because somebody else doesn't like it.

And I will just end with that image I started with. The First Amendment, freedom of speech, it is like an apple, and everybody just wants to take one bite out of the apple and if we let everybody take one bite of the apple, there is nothing left to it. So, we have got to defend not just the speech we love and the speech we agree with, but also the speech that might force us to learn something new or the speech that we think we really detest and we despise, that is what the First Amendment is about.

I want to thank the great Ruby Bridges for gracing us today. It means so much to us to have you with us. And Ms. Hull, Ms. Freeman, Mr. Pidluzny—forgive me—and Ms. Berg, all the students, everybody participating, thank you for this important investment in American freedom.

And the meeting is now adjourned.

Witnesses will have five days to get us any changes to their testimony, and members will have five days within which to submit additional written questions for the witnesses to the chair and we will send them to you. If people have further questions, and please respond to them as quickly as you can.

Mr. RASKIN. And with that, the meeting is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:50 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

