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HB 2236: Establishing parents' right to direct the education
Opponent - Written only
Pat Gouger, Private Citizen, Overland Park, KS

Chairman Thomas and Members of the Committee,

House bill 2236 is overly broad and would create chaos in the classroom. It would allow any student's parent to veto and opt out of any assignment or lesson plan for any reason.

“...each parent of a student enrolled in any school district shall be permitted by such school district to object to any educational materials or activities on the basis that such material or activity harms the student or impairs the parent's sincerely held beliefs, values or principles”

A classroom cannot function in this manner. A teacher would have to stop and exempt every objecting student from the required lesson and then provide separate substitutes. It would require teachers to provide substitute individual lesson plans on demand. Again this is simply unworkable. I don't believe this is a bug in the legislation, but a desired feature.

Think about the types of chaos this would cause from parents' beliefs and ideologies of both the left and right. One student may object in the classroom to a lesson teaching about Christopher Columbus's role as a colonizer that represents the start of genocide against Native Americans. A second student might also object to a more traditionally taught lesson that Christopher Columbus was a great explorer that discovered the New World and publicly reject that lesson.

Do we now exempt both students from learning about the history of European countries' involvement with the development of America and leave both uneducated about history? Yes, that is what this bill would require. In the interest of managing the daily workload and avoiding juggling multiple alternative lesson plans, maybe the teacher has to simply suspend the instruction on this subject and deny all kids a history lesson in this area. This would put Kansas students at a disadvantage on college admission tests by not getting a complete education as compared to students from other states.

Every school topic is subject to chaos over different interpretations from each individual parent. Do we allow kids to opt out from lessons about Martin Luther King Jr. because of an objection about his role in organizing with labor unions that are perceived to be socialist or that any discussion about race is harmful? This bill would allow for some parents to object about traditional European history being emphasized over other world history. Objections could be made to effectively cancel lessons about the role of the founding fathers based on what is believed to be their offensive ownership of slaves. Teaching about any war could be objectionable. Students of Vietnamese, or Korean dissent could object to lessons about those wars and US policy in Southeast Asia. Children of German and Italian descent may object to

World War II lessons that describe leaders in Europe as Nazis or fascist. They may even object to being taught about the Holocaust.

English literature curriculum would be gutted by objections because nearly every great book has some level of controversy associated with it. Even English grammar lessons could be hijacked over objections and disagreement about the proper use of pronouns.

Individual objections could be made in any art, theater, or music class over disagreements about the interpretation of a specific piece. Objections could be made based simply on the authorship of the content. A substitute option is not an option. A school play can not be performed having kids delivering lines from different plays at the same time. A band has to play the same piece of music. One instrument can not play from another section at the same time.

A student could object to the inhumane treatment of animals in cooking class because of a deeply held personal belief and demand replacement vegan lesson options.

The bill's language doesn't require the objection be based in truth, only a personally held belief from parent or guardian that the lesson is somehow harmful or a detriment to their principles or parenting to opt out. An objection could be made to historical facts like John F. Kennedy legitimately winning the presidency in 1960 or Donald J. Trump losing in 2020. Again, the objection does not have to be rooted in truth, only a strongly held personal belief. If any parent feels so strongly about directing curriculum directly, they are free to pursue options in other settings, such as homeschools or collectives.

Leave setting the curriculum to educational professionals that devote their lives to building a well rounded system. Support our classroom instruction and the teachers that work hard to deliver it by letting them do the job they have been highly trained to do.

Thank You,
Pat Gouger
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