

Supplement to earlier testimony on Oregon Senate Bill 664 (2019):

A week ago, I submitted a recommendation for a “no” vote. Here are some clarifications. One, I honor Holocaust survivors and their families, and want to pass on their historical legacy. Two, as a now-retired psychiatrist, I’ve come to know many former prisoners of war who suffered similarly, and want students to learn all of these memoirs of humanity’s dark side. This bill is fatally flawed as it now stands, by erroneously linking such atrocities with social justice grievances commonly put forth in today’s sociopolitical milieu. These grievances differ in kind from actual genocide. To mandate linking them transfers the emotional charge of true genocide onto the social grievances, making ongoing political debates more trauma-driven than they need to be. Paradoxically, it diminishes the full impact of transcendent evildoing such as the Holocaust. This factual error inexorably fosters indoctrinating students into victim-based identity politics that wrongly pits social justice against our common citizenship. So, point three, I strongly support teaching the factual history that all informed citizens need to know, but repudiate misusing this history to support political agendas that not everybody shares. We need to promote free debate about the latter, not prematurely close it off. Here are some specific examples of this bill’s confusions.

2(d) mandates that we “combat misinformation... and discrimination”... through “resistance, reform, and celebration.” Two points here. (1) What constitutes “misinformation” is debatable, and again, education best encourages constructive debate. (2) “Resistance, reform, and celebration” unnecessarily imply activist conflict. “Knowledge through corrective information and free debate” would be more conciliatory and pro-democratic. 2(e) lumps citizens into the categories of “perpetrator, collaborator, bystander, victim or rescuer.” All of them indirectly suggest social conflict and wrongdoing, rather than common citizenship, and fuel the fire of traumatic re-enactment. Such confusions simply don’t belong in this bill. 2(h) mandates teaching “the history of discrimination in this state.” This history is factual, and as such should be taught. What’s omitted is problematic here. Even today, Oregon is increasingly becoming a state where “correctness” is obligatory, with ideological discrimination being rationalized as social beneficence. The bill also mandates “cultural diversity”, another topic that is popular but in debate. “Ideological diversity” would better promote real democracy.

In summary, I urge that SB 664 be defeated in its current form, for reasons just summarized. If passed, I strongly recommend retaining its relevant historical facts but deleting all provisions that even subtly indoctrinate students into prevailing social justice ideologies.

Respectfully submitted,

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