

Oregon State Education Committee

Senate Bill 664

Requires school districts to provide instruction about Holocaust and genocide beginning with 2020-2021 school year.

Chair: Representative Margaret Doherty

Vice-Chair Representative Teresa Alonso Leon

Vice-Chair Representative Cheri Helt

Member Representative Diego Hernandez

Member Representative Courtney Neron

Member Representative Jeff Reardon

Member Representative E. Werner Reschke

Member Representative Janeen Sollman

Member Representative Kim Wallan

We are more divided today than at any point since the civil rights era or the civil war. Most of us feel this in our gut. The recent San Diego Poway Synagogue shooting terrifyingly and tragically exemplifies this division. But it also reflects a failure of our education system. The shooter, radicalized in online discussion forums that will never be eliminated with even the most repressive censorship, had no intellectual or emotional tools with which to examine the narratives he encountered online.

We would hope that SB 664 would be the needed antidote to this ever-escalating problem. However, privileging, as it does, a single historical event and a single understanding of that event, this bill will only serve to create more division as it doesn't allow for open discussion and critical analyses with all research included.

The Holocaust is a privileged narrative with strongly controlled boundaries disallowing any discussion of the topic outside of the political dogma.

World War II was the deadliest military conflict in history. An estimated total of 70–85 million people perished, about 3% of the 1940 world population. That war is a shared world tragedy and instead of mourning and studying it together that it may never happen again, it has become one more tool of division to be exploited.

Countries with mandated Holocaust education have not seen a reduction in anti-Semitism or an increase in peaceful dialogue and national unity. Instead, they have stigmatized and even criminalized the act of critical thinking about the Holocaust, opening the way to more Poway's.

The Oregon education system could lead the way in encouraging open debate about all subjects. But this is not the bill to do it.

Students need to be exposed to a range of perspectives and sources when they study any historical event. Equally importantly, they need to learn and practice the critical thinking skills necessary to evaluate these sources and the communication skills required to discuss them rationally.

The most important gift you can give a child is to nurture their natural curiosity and provide them with the skills and resources to satisfy that curiosity.

We need to seriously review where our education system is going as the research shows the huge slip in knowledge and yet students, emotionally charged with certain viewpoints, have never studied, and understand little about those political ideas.

The most important gift you can give a child is the ability to debate and discuss civilly ideas, issues with many different voices. We are losing this aspect of civility in our society.

We need to focus our youth on what unites us and not what divides us.

Thank you,

Marlayne Madison