



ROBERT A. WAGNER
SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

Good afternoon Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Thomsen and members of the committee,

For the record, I'm Rob Wagner. I'm the State Senator for District 19, representing communities of the tri-counties - Lake Oswego, SW Portland, Tualatin, and West Linn.

Thank you for having me and my colleagues here today to discuss a crucial issue - instruction in our schools on this nation's and state's history of racism.

Like many of you, I am an avid student of Oregon history, including the history of our state constitution. In 1859, Oregon was the only state admitted to the Union with an exclusion law in our Constitution. This wasn't removed for 67 years - in 1926 - with still 37% of Oregonians voting NO.

I want to point out a few lines from a book of Oregon History by former State Representative Tom Marsh - about the mindset of Oregonians 100 years ago. Page 140 states "Kapsner Kubli was one of Oregon's most influential politicians - A shrewd opportunist, he was very successful in exploiting the fears and bigotry. When a resurrected Ku Klux Klan made a grab for power in 1922 - Kapsner K. Kubli, initials KKK - was issued Klan membership card number 1...In 1923, Kubli was elected speaker of the Oregon House."

We can say, that was long ago - mindsets have changed - however, it wasn't until a ballot measure in 2002 - the year that our current high school seniors were born - that much of the racist language was officially removed from Oregon constitution. Yet, when asked the question about removing that odious stain from our past - 352,000 fellow Oregonians voted NO.

We have a responsibility to ensure that our laws and the education children receive in this state do not ignore our past. The legislative concept is intended to reinforce what we have already done with ethnic studies and inclusive education and shines an intentional light on what we have not. I know Senator Frederick is working on amendments that will address some of the concerns.

However, we owe it to the youth of our state, especially the students who continue to struggle with finding their place here, to share the truth about Oregon's founding, the legacy of racism. It is up to us to support our educators to enact change.

This legislative session, we are working to actively address policies, budgets, and even language in our own constitution that addresses these historic failings. We are in the national eye - just two days ago, National Geographic published an article questioning whether Oregon has reconciled its racist past.

Only through an actively anti-racist frame can we confront the persistent truths of racial inequality.

Thank you for holding a public hearing on SB 683 - the Anti-Racist Curriculum Act - I urge the committee's support for the bill.