

Idaho Statesman

Bullying venues into canceling speakers does not promote honest debate on the issues

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The Idaho Freedom Foundation is hosting a “school choice” rally at a church in Garden City on Monday after the Basque Center canceled the event over concerns about public safety and criticism from those opposed to the rally. School vouchers are a terrible idea. They take money away from the public education system. Having tax dollars “follow the student” is a gross misunderstanding of how public education funding works. “Fund students, not systems,” sounds nice, but it fails to recognize that it is indeed a system that educates students.

The word “system” is even in the Idaho Constitution: “The stability of a republican form of government depending mainly upon the intelligence of the people, it shall be the duty of the legislature of Idaho, to establish and maintain a general, uniform and thorough system of public, free common schools.” (Emphasis ours.)

We disagree with Corey DeAngelis, of the Cato Institute, on a lot of his views on public education and school vouchers. We also have serious concerns about where his views might be coming from. We suspect a lot of the drive for school vouchers comes not from an altruistic “we just want to help the children” mentality, but rather is part of a cynical push by private companies champing at the bit to get their hands on some of that sweet, sweet public education tax money under the guise of official-sounding names like “American Federation for Children,” “The Center for American Education” and the “Educational Freedom Institute.”

The Idaho Freedom Foundation — which really hates public education, wants to bring it all crashing down and calls schools “government indoctrination camps” — is bringing DeAngelis to Boise for a “Fund Students, Not Systems Rally” on Monday at the Foothills Christian Church on State Street in Garden City.

The rally originally had been scheduled to take place at the Basque Center in downtown Boise. But the Basque Center canceled its contract with the Idaho Freedom Foundation after some groups and people were critical of its move to rent out space to such a group for such an event.

There were concerns about protests and counterprotests, general public safety and possible damage to the historic building itself.

The Idaho 97 Project, a relatively new organization whose stated aim is to fight back against extremism in Idaho, also encouraged the public to reserve tickets to the event so that others couldn't attend.

The Idaho Freedom Foundation decried criticism of the Basque Center as cancel culture and saw the effort as an attempt to quell free speech by hijacking the event.

They're right.

The Idaho 97 Project and its supporters, unfortunately, bullied the Basque Center into canceling the event.

Private venues are now being put in the unfortunate position of being the arbiters of what events are acceptable or risk getting attacked if they rent out their space to someone that some group doesn't like.

That's not right.

We wouldn't approve if, for example, the Idaho Liberty Dogs bullied a venue into canceling an event with, say, Cornel West, Angela Davis or Jane Fonda.

Sure, you can say that if a private business wants to host a controversial figure, then it should be willing to suffer the consequences of that decision. That's how the free market works.

But if you're trying to stop someone from coming to speak, preventing a venue from hosting a speaker or keeping others from hearing someone speak, then you really are just playing into the narrative that you can't debate someone on the merits of their ideas, so the only device left to you is to stop them from speaking in the first place. At the very least, it makes you look as if you're afraid to let someone speak, because you're afraid you can't compete with their ideas.

Just because you support public education — as we do — and don't agree with some of the "school choice" arguments — which we don't — doesn't mean you have the right to force a venue's hand or threaten the other side.

In the end, unfortunately, it's just one more way we're digging trenches in this cultural divide.