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## **“Parental Rights Do Not Negate Teachers Being Free To Teach in Their Own Style”**

April 7, 2023

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### ***“Children Should be Taught to Think – Not What to Think”***

I have read several letters to editors regarding a recent [Old Lyme] RTC [Republican Town Committee] letter apparently mailed to all residents of Lyme and Old Lyme and I'd like to share a third perspective on the matter which I hope and expect will appeal to the majority of our citizens – the all too often overlooked and forgotten Moderate voters. However they're registered, they vote with their own minds and have no misplaced loyalty to one party or the other.

I felt compelled to participate in this conversation because there are myriad parties sharing very biased opinions and while speaking under the guise of wanting what's best for the towns, finish their statements with telling us what to think and for whom to vote in November. I would say ignore them all and instead listen to friends and associates you know and respect.

For the sake of time, I'll focus on the “dog whistle” of “parental rights”. In my experience the term “dog whistle” is cut from the same cloth as any other strawman fallacy wherein someone misinterprets what you said and ignores your intent and replaces it with their contorted version and then attacks that instead.

“People who invoke the term ‘parental rights’ have different things in mind and different aspirations,” said Neal McCluskey, the director of the Center for Educational Freedom at the libertarian Cato Institute in Washington. “My general impression when I see people invoking ‘parental rights,’ it's been connected to a general idea that parents have been cut out of decisions made by schools.”

“Parental rights” is being represented as a dog whistle for banning books and censorship and anyone who utters the phrase should be summarily ignored. This is beyond ironic.

The idea of dismissing anyone's opinion based on opinion, perspective, or association is the type of bias we should all be fighting against.

The antithesis of parental rights is parental apathy and school districts that lack parental interest have suffered terribly because of the inevitable trickle-down of apathy, disinterest, and lack of motivation experienced by students when their parents "leave education to the educators".

We have the greatest teachers in Region 18 and are lucky to have them. I have dealt directly with many of them on a variety of topics and venues and have personally observed their excellence. I have made a point to stress my personal belief that the purpose of school is to educate rather than indoctrinate and to my eye, the faculty, and staff overwhelmingly agree with this perspective.

Strong communities are built when everyone is involved and works together. Parental rights do not negate teachers being free to teach in their own style – they only keep the door open so that parents can remain involved in the education of their children. We should avoid at all costs the idea that one group or another is prohibited from expressing their perspective due to "dog whistle" words/phrases or group affiliation.

It has been my experience that when people have questions and are allowed to ask them, they find the answers to be quite agreeable. When those doors of communication are closed, the rumor mills take over and the worst and most sensational ideas take over the conversation.

There will always be ideas, classes, and curricula being taught in school with which we will disagree but after school, we'll have co-workers, bosses, and supervisors with whom we'll disagree too. The purpose of school is to prepare us for working together in spite of difficulties and to learn to disagree pleasantly, respectfully, and productively. Children should be taught to think – not what to think.

Let's keep things simple and look at people based on the content of their character above all other elements. I'm sure if we do that earnestly and honestly, we'll all find that we agree with each other far more than we're being led to believe.