

# The Detroit News

## Conservative? Different standards apply

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If you hold views counter to the groupthink that's dominating today's politically correct norms, beware. You could be at risk of losing your reputation or even your job.

This could stifle the free expression we hold dear in this country — or once did. The right to free speech means nothing if you can't exist as a full member of society, and that should include the ability to express yourself without damaging consequences.

Yet an increasing number of Americans feel that is no longer a reality.

A new national survey from the Cato Institute found that 62% of individuals say they self-censor because they are concerned others may find their views offensive.

This is a bipartisan concern, but it is most pronounced among conservatives. Among Republicans, 77% say they are afraid to share at least some of their political opinions. That number falls to 52% of Democrats.

Strong liberals are the only group with a majority (58%) that said they disagreed the political climate prevents them from saying what they believe.

“The left is so censorious, and in such a position of cultural power ..., that you'd have to be a fool not to fear for your livelihood and reputation by voicing an unwoke opinion,” writes Rod Dreher, senior editor at the American Conservative. “This is unsustainable. You cannot have a stable country in which so many people are afraid to speak their minds, unless it is a police state.”

Given a recent spat of people saying they lost their jobs at least in part because of their political beliefs, social media posts, or other sentiments, it's no wonder the trend is having a chilling effect on what Americans feel comfortable saying to each other.

For instance, earlier this month Walled Lake social studies teacher and coach Justin Kucera claims he was fired after he tweeted in support of President Donald Trump. The district counters Kucera wasn't fired over the tweets, but has declined to offer more rationale since it's a personnel matter.

Regardless, Kucera's firing happened shortly after he retweeted Trump's “SCHOOLS MUST OPEN IN THE FALL!!!” message. Kucera had followed with a tweet stating: “I'm done being silent. @realDonaldTrump is our president.”

Less than two weeks later, Kucera was done being a teacher.

Similarly, others around the country have lost their jobs for having the audacity to say “all lives matter” or some variation of the sentiment.

The pushback is often immediate and severe, and the message is that if you don’t fall into lockstep with the Black Lives Matter movement, you’re racist. And that’s troubling.

Forcing conformity goes against our most treasured rights as Americans.

As the Federalist’s Mollie Hemingway tweeted this week, “In a free country, the proper counter to speech you disagree with is more speech, not censorship.”

I’m proud of my alma mater Hillsdale College for standing up for its First Amendment rights earlier this month when it held its commencement ceremony, postponed as most were because of COVID-19.

The ceremony seems to have gone off without a hitch, and the college closely followed state and federal social distancing guidelines to protect attendees and the community.

The college firmly believed that the ceremony was a constitutionally protected expressive activity, and thus allowed despite Gov. Gretchen Whitmer’s order banning gatherings over a certain size. Yet Whitmer, along with Attorney General Dana Nessel, pointed fingers at the college, expressing “grave concern” about the planned graduation.

What’s hypocritical is that Whitmer had disobeyed her own order just weeks before when marching shoulder to shoulder in Highland Park in support of Black Lives Matter.

As protesters in that march had a right to voice their views, the small conservative college has a right to express its beliefs. One group shouldn’t get special treatment just because its views are in vogue.

As Robert Norton, Hillsdale’s general counsel, says: “We have the right to counter with the things that we believe in.”