

Does school censorship undermine learning?

To find out how the First Amendment is supposed to work in public schools, don't ask school officials. Ask the kids. Strange as it may seem, many students actually believe what they're taught in civics class about their constitutional rights.

Consider Raymond Hosier, a seventh-grader in Schenectady, N.Y. He doesn't buy his school's argument that his rosary beads are a "gang symbol" that should be banned. For Raymond, they are an expression of faith that he wears in memory of his uncle who died recently (and who taught Raymond to pray the rosary) and in memory of his brother who died wearing that same rosary in 2005.

After being suspended from Oneida Middle School last month for refusing to stop wearing the rosary outside his shirt, Raymond, with his mother, filed suit (with help from the American Center for Law and Justice). He may be only 13 years old, but Raymond already seems to know more about religious liberty and free speech than his school administrators.

Consider the five high school students in Wisconsin who took to heart those lessons in social studies about good citizenship. Worried about sexual assault in our society, they made T-shirts with the message "Stop Abuse" on one side and a statistic about sexual assault on the other to create awareness of the problem.

The students soon discovered that Mosinee High School officials hadn't gotten the First Amendment memo about student rights. The associate principal confiscated the shirts after the students refused to stop wearing them. (Later a superintendent apologized for the seizures as an overreaction.)

In both incidents, school administrators wrongly assumed that the students had little or no freedom to exercise their First Amendment rights in public schools. But as the U.S. Supreme Court famously said in *Tinker v. Des Moines* (1969), students do not "shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate."

Nothing in the law prevents Oneida Middle School from keeping order by barring students from wearing gang symbols to school, including "beads," as mentioned in the school's dress code. But Raymond isn't a member of a criminal gang and doesn't wear his rosary to advocate gang membership or violence.

"Beads are beads," says the superintendent. But under the First Amendment, that isn't good enough. Without a compelling reason — some clear evidence that Raymond's rosary would cause a serious disruption or promote gang activity — the school has no business telling him he can't express his faith by wearing a religious symbol.

Nothing in the law prevents Mosinee High School from banning T-shirt messages that are vulgar or obscene, or messages that would create a substantial school disruption. "Stop Abuse" T-shirts are none of the above.

The T-shirt-wearing students were simply taking a stand on a serious social problem. Isn't that what we hope a good civics education will inspire students to do?

One of the Mosinee administrators told the *Wausau Daily Herald* that the shirts were creating a "disruption" by "upsetting some students" and distracting others during exams.

Another school official was quoted as saying he was all for educating people about this issue, but these students didn't go through proper channels to get approval to wear the shirts.

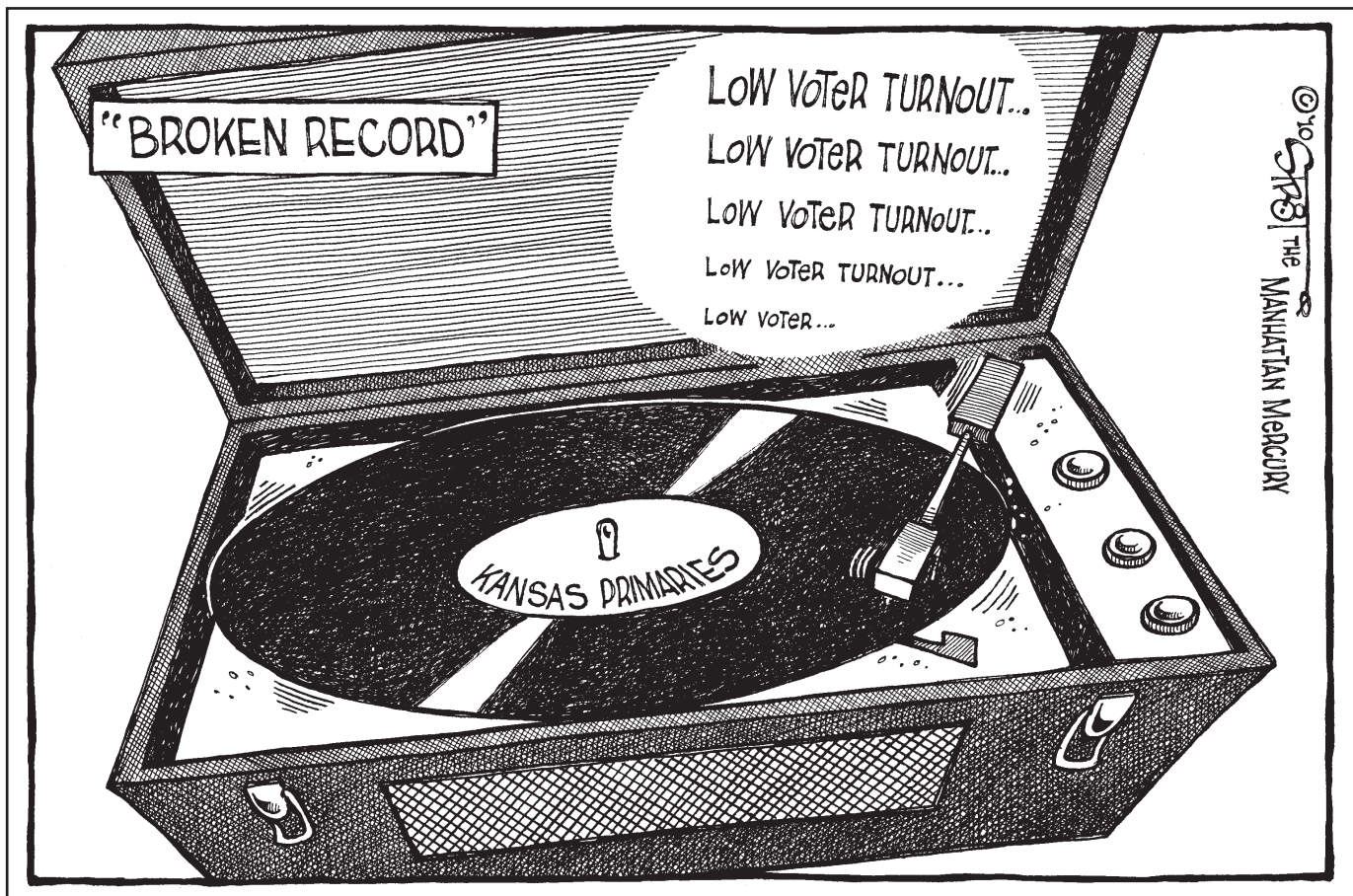
"Sexual Assault Awareness Month is in April," he said. "Why didn't they choose to do this stuff then?"

These administrators need to look more closely at what the law says. In my reading of the *Tinker* decision, the fact that some students may not want to see "Stop Abuse" T-shirts isn't even close to what the Supreme Court means by "substantial disruption." On the contrary, banning the message because it makes some people uncomfortable is a classic "heckler's veto," which the courts have ruled unconstitutional.

Moreover, students don't need permission to wear political or religious messages on their clothing. Nor do they have to wait for the topic-of-the-month to express their views.

Instead of censoring students who have the courage of their convictions, school officials should strive to create a school climate that supports religious liberty and freedom of expression. Educating for good citizenship takes more than a few lessons about the Constitution. It requires practicing what you teach.

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We can't let fear control us

My faith in the good people of New York City was fortified when a panel approved the request to build a mosque near the site of the Twin Towers now known as Ground Zero. Blocking this request would only give power to the few radical Muslims. AlQuida, who committed these attacks. At the heart of this debate is the very foundation of our country, religious freedom and tolerance.

As Americans, we took these attacks very personally, and understandably so, but equally important to remember is the name of these structures, The World Trade Center. The attackers targeted this building for a reason; it represented the success of world commerce and cooperation. The argument has been how insensitive of the Muslims to want to build in this area.

Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



Muslims lost people in 9/11 and I'm not referring to the hijackers. There were Muslims employed there and remember fewer than 15% of Muslims are Arabs. Fear is what has driven this country since 9/11 and it is now time to let it go.

We were living in Oregon on April 19, 1995, the day of the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. I remember watching the story un-

fold, the children from the day care center, the frantic search by family members and the haunting picture of the fireman carrying a small child. In our anger and fear the speculation was focused on finding the "Middle Easterner" seen fleeing the scene of this horrific act. Little did we know at that time, it wasn't a stranger from a strange land, it was a fair haired young veteran raised in a rural area, who carried out, up to that time, the greatest terrorist attack on our soil.

Terrorists come in all shapes and colors. They walk among us, they live near and they live far. What will give these groups power is our fear. A building cannot destroy us nor can our freedom, but if we allow fear to become our companion we will be at their mercy.

Take time to hover because this too shall pass

My sister, who has no children, once accused me of being a helicopter parent. That was because, from her viewpoint, I went to a job interview with one of my kids. The truth is I was just keeping her company for the long road trip. I stayed at the mall while she interviewed.

But I'll concede a point here: perhaps we have been overly involved in the lives of our kids. Two of the three daughters are single. They need sounding boards and help with stuff like moving! Oh, moving!!!! Last time I swore, NEVER again.

This spring we had the "eureka" moment about how to move. The youngest got a job where the company provided a "relocation allowance." For those not used to cleaning out the livestock trailer what that means is you call the van lines and get estimates. On moving day big strong guys carry your stuff down two flights of stairs and put it in a truck. You write them a check.

Three days later the stuff is in Pennsylvania; where the hubby is! The movers carry it up a flight of stairs and the hubby has it all unpacked by the time you get there.

I was told it mostly worked that way except for the part about the hubby unpacking! Well, no system is perfect!

So the middle daughter decides to move to Norman, Oklahoma. I said, "You are getting a moving van!" But the bids came in high and instead of having a "relocation allowance" she is getting a teaching stipend or some such nonsense

This Too Shall Pass Nancy Hagman



and needs that for groceries and rent! This would have been a good time to quit hovering! But the new apartment is on the ground floor and U-Haul is cheap! Guess we will move her!

Of course it wasn't that easy, it never is! We couldn't find any kind of rental trailer, but the hubby recalled his cousin, who sells trailers, had once mentioned he would rent us one. It was a bit inconvenient that we would have to bring it back but it was bigger than the one we thought we needed and that was good.

I won't bore with the details of the trip! It was long, it was hot, it was work! It takes a lot of fuel to keep the truck going and me cool! It takes time; time is money! We eat out: more money!

And I'm really sad. Used to be the closest kid was fifteen miles away. The furthest was three and a half hours. Now she is the closest! My baby is in Pennsylvania and a family member is going to be a SOONER! Is there a support group for that? Oh, well, no one died.

But on the way home a brand new tire on the brand new empty trailer blew! The lug nuts had been secured with an

impact wrench and all we had was a poor excuse for a wrench. I was all wound up to give the hubby a lecture about being prepared but I had to do the short version because I had left the cell phone at his brother's.

Finally a knight in shining armor (or in this case an old guy with some decent tools) came along. On the road again!

We rolled into the Ellsworth DQ for supper. Over time it has been a favorite stopping place when we travel that stretch of highway. I thought of all those trips: State Fair, State Basketball, family trips to see the aforementioned brother and the time of Patricia's wedding, a lot of happy times! Yet I mostly associate the Ellsworth DQ with fatigue and a vague longing for a shower and my own bed.

When we got back into the truck a piece of paper fluttered out on the ground. It was some street directions I had written down before we left home but it took me a moment to realize that.

At first all I saw was the bright green stripe at the top of the note-paper. Before I picked it I remembered what it said there: "This too shall pass!"

How many times have we been there in a moment and just been so weary and worried we forgot to think of how blessed we are! And then the moment passes! The good and the bad; over and done. If we don't hover we miss it.

For the rest of my life the only thing I want to miss out on is moving!!!

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Dear Editor,

Hospice Services Board of Directors extends our heartfelt appreciation to the many hospice volunteers for all they do to help people live every moment of life to the fullest. Hospice is about how you live!

Hospice volunteers play an indispensable role in enabling our organization to offer the best care possible for patients living with life-limiting illness, their families and caregivers. By sharing time, energy and expertise, they bring compassion and caring to the lives of those in need.

The historical roots of hospice in the United States involved volunteers wanting to improve end-of-life care. Recent research suggests volunteers continue to play a vital role in hospice. The involvement of hospice volunteers influences overall satisfaction with hospice.

Thank you to all Hospice Volunteers!

Secretary Vicki Enfield

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