



LIBRARIES

Coeur D'Alene, Idaho

Books that a patron judged to be critical of President Donald Trump disappeared from the shelves of the Coeur d'Alene Public Library.

Librarian Bette Ammon fished this complaint from the suggestion box: "I noticed a large volume of books attacking our president. And I am going to continue hiding these books in the most obscure places I can find to keep this propaganda out of the hands of young minds. Your liberal angst gives me great pleasure."

The library posted the note on a bulletin board, along with a typed note from the library. The library invited the patron to provide titles that s/he would like to see, adding: "We are sorry you feel the need to hide books you don't agree with since that takes up valuable time to reorder and replace lost titles." Reported in: *Spokane Spokesman-Review*, September 27.

Orange City, Iowa

More than 200 books have been donated to the Orange City Public Library in northwest Iowa after a man checked out—and then burned—four LGBTQ children's books on October 19. Religious activist Paul Dorr threw four library books into a burning trash can while streaming live on Facebook. He burned the books in protest of the city's second annual gay pride event.

The library had faced criticism earlier this year, when members of the conservative, historically Dutch Reformed community spoke out against LGBTQ books held by the library. In response to the uproar, the library in March 2018 changed its classification system and opted to arrange books by subject and category instead of alphabetically by the author's name.

In his October video, Dorr reads a blog post titled "May God and the Homosexuals of OC Pride Please Forgive Us!" from his website, which he calls "Rescue The Perishing." The video ends with Dorr burning *Two Boys Kissing*, a young adult novel by David Levithan; *Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress*, a children's book about a boy who likes to wear a tangerine dress, by Christine Baldacchino; *This Day In June*, a picture book about a pride parade, by Gayle E. Pitman, and *Families, Families, Families!* by Suzanne and Max Lang, about nontraditional families.

Since then, several GoFundMe pages and Facebook fundraisers have raised thousands of dollars for the library—much more than the roughly \$50 needed to replace the burned books.

Dorr calls *Rescue The Perishing* a "crisis center and pro-life, pro-family movement." He has declined to be interviewed and indicated that he will not pay any library fines or fees for the destroyed books.

Orange City is the county seat of Sioux County, known as the most conservative county in the state. Reported in: *Sioux City Journal*, October 28; *Des Moines Register*, October 31.

Berkley, Michigan

Someone has been hiding or removing the Berkley Public Library's trilogy of *Fifty Shades* movies that depict consensual sexual bondage, as well as two other films on DVD. The library says it is censorship.

"One of the tenets of being a library and being a librarian is access to all information. You can't pick and choose what you're going to carry. If patrons want that, we have to provide that information, even if it is a feature film," said Lauren Arnsman, a reference librarian at the library.

To fight back against the self-anointed censor, the library is displaying the recently found missing movies with a sign that reads: "The Berkley Public Library is against censorship. Someone didn't want you to check these items out. They deliberately hid all of these items so you wouldn't find them. This is not how libraries work."

Arnsman said the most recent *Fifty Shades* movie, *Fifty Shades Freed*, was noticed missing in mid-June. A year ago, she said, the second of three *Fifty Shades* movies, *Fifty Shades Darker*, also went mysteriously missing. The library bought a new copy of that movie and nothing else happened. "This time they went missing and because of it happening a year before, we kind of had a feeling it was deliberate," Arnsman said.

The library bought new copies of the movie on DVD and Blu-ray to replace the missing movie. Then, the new copies of the movie and older copies of the other movies in the trilogy went missing.

Additional investigation by the library showed the movie *Eyes Wide Shut* and the documentary *Jerusalem* also were missing.

Most of the movies were found hidden in the library, though Arnsman did not want to reveal specifically where the movies were hidden. Copies of the older *Fifty Shades* movies have not been found, but new copies have been purchased.

In all, Arnsman said the library has spent more than \$100 to replace the movies, but now has all of them in DVD and Blu-ray formats for patrons to check out. No one has come forward to say they took or moved the movies. Arnsman doesn't expect the person to do so, either.

She said the trilogy of *Fifty Shades* books (on which the movies were based) has not gone missing.



Arnsman said about 14,000 people are in the library's service area of Berkley, Michigan, but the library also has patrons from Southfield, Huntington Woods, Oak Park and Ferndale.

She said she was surprised at the positive comments and community support voiced after the Facebook posts.

Supporters praised the library for its recent display of the formerly missing movies and its stance, with comments ranging from "thank you" to "love my library." Reported in: *Detroit Free Press*, July 3, July 5.

El Paso, Texas

An El Paso mom complained to a local TV station that her son received an "inappropriate" book from a local library. Tiffany Meehan's kids took part in a summer reading program at the Jenna Welch and Laura Bush Community Library. They received a goodie bag with a free book at the end of the program.

Her 11-year-old son, Harrison, got a book titled *Will Grayson, Will Grayson*, an LGBT-themed young adult novel by John Green and David Levithan. Harrison said he read three paragraphs before taking it to his mom.

"I read it and it had a bunch of cuss words," Harrison said.

Meehan said it only got more graphic from there. "As I flipped through, it just got worse and worse. (It was) very sexually explicit and it uses many curse words," she said.

She took the book to the library to find out why it was given to her 11-year-old. She was told it was a mix-up and that book was only supposed to be for students between 13 and 17 years old.

KFOX14 reached out to the library. An official said about four children in the 10-12-year-old age range received

the book mistakenly. Each family was contacted and offered a replacement book.

Meehan said something like a rating system on books could have helped prevent this.

"It's not appropriate for kids," she said. "It would've been nice to be able to pick up the book and see an "M" for mature and explicit sexual content and language and I could've said, 'OK, that's not for us.'" Reported in: KFOX14 TV, July 6.

Plano, Texas

The Plano Library in September removed *Holy Terror*, a graphic novel by Frank Miller, from circulation, in response to concerns raised by the Dallas/Fort Worth chapter of the Council on American Islamic Relations.

CAIR-DFW Executive Director John Janney had asked the library to see if there were any standards, policies, or code of ethics that the publicly funded library followed when faced with publications that dehumanize or marginalize minorities—especially when those publications are targeted at children. After a short conversation with a library representative about the library's screening process, the library reviewed the graphic novel and agreed to withdraw it from circulation.

Miller conceived the novel as response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, but in 2018 he expressed some regret for the book. Reported in: cair.com, September 19.

Washington County, Utah

Library staff at the Hurricane branch of Utah's Washington County Library System (WCLS) were told to change signage on LGBTQ-themed displays and stop wearing buttons pointing library visitors to LGBTQ resources. Director Joel Tucker stated that promoting LGBTQ materials was

sending a message of advocacy on the part of the library, which he wanted to maintain as a neutral space. Library staff, however, saw the policy as discriminatory and directly in conflict with the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights.

In June 2017, WCLS employee Natalie Daniel created an exhibit for Pride Month titled "Got Pride?" featuring a collection of LGBTQ-themed material. Some patrons reportedly complained, according to Tucker, as did an unnamed county official. Tucker, who is in charge of WCLS's eight branches, instructed workers to change the display mid-month to "June is Pride Month," and to remove from the display additional LGBTQ resources linked to outside organizations. Although the rest of the display remained in place throughout the month, Tucker issued a directive that future displays should not be LGBTQ-themed. Some patrons would interpret such signage as "advocating for that point of view" on the part of the library, he told the press.

This year, library staff was again instructed not to create a display specifically pointing to LGBTQ-themed material. Instead, the display addressed the broader theme of diversity, featuring material on race, religion, sexual orientation—including LGBTQ materials—and other topics, with signage reading "Libraries are for everyone."

To supplement the display, some employees had buttons made that said "Ask me about LGBTQ Reads." LGBTQ Reads is a website which features LGBTQ-themed material, author interviews, guest blogs, and more. Again, claimed Tucker, patrons complained, and he directed employees to take their buttons off—also citing the library's dress and appearance policy, which called for a "business casual" appearance. "Buttons of any



kind are not in line with that professional appearance,” he told *Library Journal*.

Ammon Treasure, a clerk at the Hurricane branch, was one of the library workers who spoke out against Tucker’s actions. Treasure first went to the WCLS human resources department, but was dissatisfied with the response, which he described as repeating Tucker’s justification. So he reached out to a local paper, *The Spectrum*; the story was then picked up by a number of media outlets, including Good4Utah.com, *St George News*, *The Advocate*, and the Associated Press.

Treasure explained that highlighting LGBTQ resources in the library is not the same as promoting an agenda—and that forbidding such displays undermines the library’s role as a safe space. “There are a lot of people who have yet to come out of the closet, or are unsure of the environment we’re in, whether or not they’re going to be ridiculed,” Treasure told Good4Utah. “We wanted to be able to provide all of our community with information that they need.”

The library had built displays around other holidays and topics, Treasure noted, such as Black History Month and St. Patrick’s Day. “My hope is that by coming forward we can start an important conversation about inclusion and work toward eliminating the stigma that still surrounds this topic,” he told *The Spectrum*.

Representatives from the advocacy group Equality Utah convened a public forum at the St. George branch library on August 9, where they met with library officials and staff. There, Tucker explained that LGBTQ displays have been banned at all of Washington County’s libraries, noting, “If you put up a display that says LGBTQ, you’re pushing away a segment of our society.”

When Tucker acknowledged that he did not consider Black History Month displays controversial, Mark Chambers, a former town councilman, state senate candidate, and member of Equality Utah, stated, “When you say Black History Month is not controversial, but our month is, you are dismissing us.”

“I would like to have found more common ground,” Tucker told *St. George News* after the forum. “I strive to be accepting to all people and all perspectives, and the LGBTQ community is a part of that. I want them to feel included and a part of the library.”

However, he told Good4Utah.com, if that common ground could not be reached he considered banning all displays throughout the WCLS system.

ALA weighed in as well. James LaRue, director of ALA’s Office for Intellectual Freedom, told Good4Utah, “Libraries providing robust services and lots of information about the world is just business as usual—that’s our whole purpose in public life. . . . We very much believe that the kinds of displays that go on in Pride Month . . . are just part of the human condition, and it makes perfect sense for them to be in libraries.”

The National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC), joined by members of Lambda Legal, the National Council of Teachers of English, the Utah Library Association, and ALA, sent Tucker an open letter on August 16. The letter read, in part, “Not only is suppressing LGBTQ displays likely to be a violation of the First Amendment, it further marginalizes a vulnerable minority group and would set a dangerous precedent of intolerance to purportedly controversial ideas. Such a culture of prejudice is toxic in any community forum, especially the library where everyone should be equally welcome and guaranteed

freedom to read, think and explore new ideas.” It also pointed to resources such as ALA’s Exhibit Spaces and Bulletin Boards guidelines and NCAC’s “Museum Best Practices for Managing Controversy.”

“All of our policies conform with the Library Bill of Rights,” Tucker told *LJ* on August 20, “and seek to further our mission of providing people with materials, information, and the space to promote ideas, inspire lifelong learning, and strengthen communities.”

Tucker and WCLS are reportedly drafting a new policy. Treasure said on August 20, “I’ve been informed that our library system will be forming a committee to create new policies about displays—in which they will be working closely with state librarians experienced with the Library Bill of Rights and upholding intellectual freedom.” Reported in: *Library Journal*, August 21.

Berkeley Springs, West Virginia

“There are fearless libraries, and then there are libraries without *Fear*.” That was how the *Washington Post* started a story about whether the Morgan County Public Library would carry Bob Woodward’s book *Fear*, about the Trump administration.

Originally, Donna Crocker, the director of the library, wanted to keep the book out of the library in the small town of Berkeley Springs in West Virginia. She confirmed that the library had no copies of *Fear*, but she declined to answer any questions about her decision. “I don’t want to get in the middle of that,” she said on September 14. “We have other Trump books.”

Later that day, Connie Perry, the president of the trustees of the Morgan County Public Library, said the library board did not know that the



library director had refused to accept a donated copy of *Fear* until the issue was raised in media reports. “The board didn’t know anything about this,” Perry said. “We have corrected that. The book has been accepted—in fact, two of them.”

Perry, who once chaired the committee to raise money to build the library, said, “Our policy always has been that we accept books. This just got blown out of proportion. It was an employee who . . . wasn’t aware of what she should have done. She should have just said, ‘Thank you.’ The board has corrected that.”

Perry noted that the library’s initial decision not to carry *Fear* had become a major issue in Berkeley Springs. “More and more people want to read it now,” she said.

The issue arose when Berkeley Springs resident Rob Campbell thought he could help out his library by donating a copy of *Fear*. He wrote a letter to the local newspaper, the *Morgan Messenger*, saying, “Recently I called to offer *Fear*, the new Woodward book, but the library declined my offer saying they wouldn’t be putting books like that on the shelves anymore.” He notes in his letter that he is happy to share his copy with anyone else who wants to read it. “I decided to be a library of one book,” he wrote.

James LaRue, director of the Office of Intellectual Freedom for the American Library Association, said public libraries should make selection decisions based on the reputation of the publisher and the author, the quality of reviews, and the level of community demand.

“Community demand is an interesting question,” LaRue said. “It may well be that there is a majoritarian view on this issue, but that does not mean that a library should sacrifice its obligation to present the other side.

Our whole credibility as an institution rests on our willingness to provide access to the most current information in our culture. . . . but that’s a local decision.”

Berkeley Springs is the county seat of Morgan County, which voted 75 percent for Donald Trump in the 2016 election. Reported in: *Washington Post*, September 14, September 15.

SCHOOLS Arab, Alabama

The fight over Confederate symbolism has landed in an Alabama town, where education leaders have banned the high school marching band from playing “Dixie” as the fight song.

Dozens of opponents of the decision packed a city school board meeting August 30 in support of the tune, which they depict as a traditional part of the soundtrack of life in their small, Southern town rather than an ode to the days of slavery in the Old South.

“We’re from Alabama, we’re not from New York,” said Daniel Haynes, 36, who attended Arab (“AY-rab”) High School and loves hearing the tune played after the Knights score a touchdown.

Board members didn’t budge. The 750-student school has a new principal, band director, football coach, and stadium this year, said Superintendent John Mullins, and the change was needed in a system where the core values include mutual respect and unity.

“I really think it’s the right decision for the right reason at the right time,” Mullins said in an interview.

Supporters of the song say they’ll now take their complaints to the City Council, which appoints the five-member school board, but it’s unclear what might happen next. An old R&B song, “The Horse,” has temporarily replaced “Dixie” in the

band’s repertoire until a new fight song is selected.

Passions are running high among some in Arab, where many are still upset by school leaders’ decision a few years ago to comply with a Supreme Court decision and end student-led Christian prayers over the public address system before football games. Complaints about “Dixie” have renewed the debate over the role of religion in pregame ceremonies.

The “Dixie” debate isn’t brewing just in Arab, an overwhelmingly white town of about 8,200 people. Fans of the tune also are complaining in Glade Spring, Virginia, after leaders there prohibited the band from playing “Dixie” during games this fall at Patrick Henry High School.

Written by Ohio native Daniel D. Emmett, “Dixie’s Land” was first performed on stage in New York in 1859, two years before the Civil War, said historian and musician Bobby Horton, who performed some of the music for Ken Burns’ epic miniseries “The Civil War.”

“It was written as what they called a walk-around tune . . . for a minstrel show. It was like a tune between acts,” said Horton.

Later known simply as “Dixie,” the song became an unofficial anthem of the rebel states after it was played at the inauguration of Confederate President Jefferson Davis in 1861. President Abraham Lincoln loved the tune and asked for it to be played at the White House the night Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered, said Horton.

University and high school bands across the South played “Dixie” for generations, but the practice waned as complaints rose about the song being a painful, racially insensitive reminder of the oppression of slavery.

The University of Mississippi’s “Pride of the South” marching band



excluded the song from its playlist in 2016, and the Marching Rebels band of Robert E. Lee High School in Midland, Texas, quit playing “Dixie” last year.

Southern historian Wayne Flynt, who remembers the song being sung in segregated schools in Alabama in the 1940s when he was a boy, said some view it as an anthem of regional pride. But “Dixie” and other Confederate emblems became symbols of white defiance against desegregation.

This summer in Arab, Mullins released a statement saying the song was being dropped because it has “negative connotations that contradict our school district’s core values of unity, integrity, and relationships.”

The song hadn’t previously been an issue in Arab, which Census statistics show is more than 96 percent white. But through the years, the band didn’t play the song when visiting more diverse schools, officials said.

School board members have publicly supported Mullins’ decision to give up “Dixie.”

The board president, former Arab football coach Wayne Trimble, said his views were shaped by an incident from the late 1970s when an opposing head coach said he wasn’t sure he could convince players on his team to make the trip to Arab because of “Dixie.”

“That has stuck with me a long time,” Trimble said in an interview. “Is that the way we want Arab to be perceived?” Reported in: Associated Press, August 31.

Conejo Valley, California

Parents will still see controversial asterisks on their child’s syllabus to flag books with mature content in Conejo Valley high schools after the board voted to keep its policy as is, following an open-meetings act violation during a revote last spring.

The Conejo Valley Unified School District board voted 3-2, with trustees Pat Phelps and Betsy Connolly dissenting, to keep the policy intact with language that’s since been removed from the California Department of Education website. There were nearly 30 speakers at a board meeting August 21, roughly evenly split in favor and against the policy.

The revival of the policy last spring came after the state’s Department of Education removed language used by the district to flag titles with mature content on high school English syllabuses with an asterisk.

During the discussion preceding the earlier vote in May, the board violated the state’s open meetings law, the Brown Act, by not producing copies of the revised policy that trustee Sandee Everett presented to the board, despite pleas from the public. A letter from the Ventura County District Attorney’s Office didn’t require the board to vote again on the matter, but board President John Andersen said trustees were doing so to avoid exposing the district to a potential lawsuit from members of the public.

The district’s core literature policy, which passed 3-1 last fall, was met with criticism manifesting out of a debate dating back more than a year, when Sherman Alexie’s *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* was suggested as a title for ninth-grade English students.

Everett authored the revised board policy last fall after the board designated a committee of administrators and teachers to create one and include the California Department of Education annotations to notify parents of mature themes.

Books with asterisks are flagged with this note: “This book was published for an adult readership and thus contains mature content. Before handing the text to a child, educators

and parents should read the book and know the child.” This is the now-defunct language that was formerly on the Department of Education website. After the changes made in the spring, that annotation in Conejo Valley will include a timestamp of October 2017.

Throughout the process, community members on either side of the argument turned out to school board meetings in droves to voice their opinions. Board members often engaged in heated debate.

From the dais, Everett defended the literature policy on August 21 by reading several letters from parents who expressed a desire to have such a policy in place.

Everett’s critics have often asserted there weren’t many people to whom this policy applied and that in the past, parents were always permitted to opt their children out of a literature title if they chose. That practice wasn’t codified by the board, however.

Board member Betsy Connolly, one of the dissenters, talked at the meeting about the division the policy has caused on the board and in the community. Yet Connolly hoped the board could move past the controversies of the past year and hoped trustees would reflect on the role they may have played “in coming to such a dark place.”

During public comment, those against the policy pleaded with the board to reconsider or postpone voting August 21. But others thanked the board, particularly Everett, for their hard work in enacting this policy. Reported in: *Ventura County Star*, August 22.

Petaluma, California

Somebody at Petaluma High in Petaluma, California, apparently cut the microphone on its valedictorian, 17-year-old Lulabel Seitz, at the graduation ceremony on June 2. Seitz says



officials had warned her not to mention being the victim of an alleged sexual assault on campus and what she claims was the school's failure to take action when she reported it.

For the first few minutes, she obeyed that restriction, concentrating instead on standard-issue stuff: hopes, dreams, and overcoming adversity. But when she turned to the forbidden topic, her microphone mysteriously stopped working.

"Let her speak!" people cried out. But she was not allowed to finish.

That wasn't the end of the story, though. The next day, she took to YouTube, where she gave her speech in its entirety, including the banned sentence, a paean to perseverance that went as follows: "And even learning on a campus in which some people defend perpetrators of sexual assault and silence their victims, we didn't let that drag us down."

Ten days later, Lulabel Sietz's video had been viewed 335,379 times. And the story has been reported by CNN, NBC, NPR and the *Washington Post*, and other media outlets that never had planned to cover graduation ceremonies at Petaluma High before that mic was cut.

Syndicated columnist Leonard Pitts Jr. of the *Miami Herald* stated:

It should be clear that the era of women suffering in silence and humiliation is over. But apparently, the memo has not yet reached Petaluma. A bright young girl alleges that she was sexually assaulted and that the people who should have helped her didn't—and administrators respond by telling her, in effect, to shut up? In so doing, they misread the morality of the moment and the limits of their own power.

"Let her speak!" demanded the crowd. "Let her speak!" Which was

noble of them. But the lesson of this moment is that things have changed.

And women no longer need permission.

Reported in: *Miami Herald*, June 13.

Greenwood Village, Colorado, and Salt Lake City, Utah

EBSCO's online research databases, used in libraries across the United States, have been removed from some school libraries in Colorado. In Utah, the databases were removed for a month—but then restored—at many school and public libraries, because some parents objected to sexual content that was included in mainstream magazines and scholarly journals within the database.

In September, the Cherry Creek School District in Greenwood Village, Colorado, cancelled its EBSCO contract after a two-year campaign led by a couple who charged that their daughter's online account in middle school allowed her to see unfiltered pornography. Drew Paterson and his wife, Robin, followed up their victory with a lawsuit against EBSCO and the nonprofit Colorado Library Consortium (CLiC), which helps libraries acquire resources, including the EBSCO database (see "*From the Bench*," page 44). The suit seeks to remove the EBSCO research service from schools across Colorado.

Pornography is Not Education, a parent group led by the Patersons, alleges that databases provided by EBSCO Industries Inc., and distributed by the CLiC consortium, contain erotic and BDSM (bondage, discipline, sadomasochism) stories that could be located through innocent searches by kids and their parents.

Paterson said it's unlikely EBSCO and the consortium embedded and distributed the pornography by

mistake. "It's difficult to believe they didn't know," he said.

"Children don't have to be looking for porn," Robin Paterson said in a statement. "They can stumble into it in these EBSCO databases. Imagine how that might affect your grade schooler."

EBSCO, based in Birmingham, Alabama, provides databases that contain thousands of scholarly and popular magazine articles for research projects. By last count, the company services 55,000 schools nationwide. It also works in Canada, Europe, and South America, Drew Paterson said.

EBSCO spokeswoman Kathleen McEvoy denied the allegations, saying the company has worked to provide appropriate content to university libraries, public libraries, school libraries, and other organizations for more than 70 years. "To be clear, EBSCO does not include pornographic titles in its databases, embed pornographic content in its databases, or receive revenue for advertising for any organization," McEvoy said. "We are appalled by the tenor of the allegations related to our intent and the inaccuracies of statements clearly made in absence of factual information."

Jim Duncan, executive director of CLiC, declined to comment directly on the lawsuit against his organization, but said the consortium provides a variety of infrastructure services to hundreds of libraries across the state. Public libraries, schools, and academic libraries routinely ask the consortium to negotiate cost-saving discounts on their behalf, including subscriptions to web-based educational and research products from vendors and publishers.

Less than a month after the lawsuit was filed in Colorado, another attack on EBSCO surfaced in Utah. In late September, a parent who accessed the EBSCO database from her home



said she found inappropriate materials and raised concerns with the Utah Education and Telehealth Network, also called the Utah Education Network (UEN). UEN provides services, including access to databases, at many school and public libraries across Utah.

Even though the access was not gained within schools, which officials say have filtering software intended to prevent students accessing inappropriate content, UEN administrators quickly decided to block access, pending an investigation. Their decision was later supported by the UEN board on a 6-1 vote. On October 19, UEN voted to restore access to EBSCO at the libraries it serves. Before EBSCO was restored, 19 magazine titles (out of a total of about 22,000) were removed because their main audience is older than K-12 students, according to Utah State Librarian Colleen Eggett.

EBSCO provides different tiers of access to its products: one for K-12 students, another for higher education and public libraries. The databases can be customized for individual libraries or schools.

UEN was created by and funded by the Utah legislature, initially as an educational television entity but evolving into an educational network over time. The Utah State School Board has no oversight authority over the education network. The Utah State Board of Education has one position on the network's 13-member board. During the time EBSCO access was cut off, the State Board of Education voted on October 4 to support restoring public school students' and teachers' access.

Peter Bromberg, executive director of the Salt Lake City Library and advocacy chairman for the Utah Library Association, was one of the voices in support of restoring access

to the database. "In blocking access to the 275 million articles to over 800,000 students across the state of Utah who rely on these extremely safe, curated and filtered research databases to do their homework every day, UEN has erred, has made a bad choice," Bromberg said. "The decision ignored the facts and was based on the report of someone searching for 45 minutes on her home computer in an unfiltered environment unlike the heavily filtered environment that this would happen in a school setting. UEN themselves said at their board meeting they were unable to replicate these results," he said. The decision to censor millions of articles "has a sweeping and negative impact on students and teachers across this state," he said.

Utah State Board of Education member Michelle Boulter noted that EBSCO is among the National Center on Sexual Exploitation's "Dirty Dozen" list.

Board member Spencer Stokes countered that the pro-censorship organization's "Dirty Dozen" list also includes Amazon, Backpage.com, Comcast, HBO, iBooks, Poster Boys, Roku, Snap, Steam, Twitter and YouTube. "I'm sorry, but if this is the 'dirty dozen,' I use the 'dirty dozen.' I use like 10 of these, like I used them last week," Stokes said.

The nationwide attack on EBSCO in libraries was covered in depth in a feature in *JIPF* nearly a year ago by James LaRue, director of the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom.

In a follow-up post on the OIF blog after the Colorado lawsuit was filed, LaRue pointed out that censoring EBSCO will expose children to more pornography, not less. Without the ability to do their school research on a curated database filled with mainstream publications, they

will use less tightly controlled search engines such as Google, and will be more likely to rely on their own smartphones rather than school or public library computers. As LaRue put it, "Students will be left, literally, to their own devices." Reported in: *ebSCO.com*, September 15, 2017; *Journal of Intellectual Freedom & Privacy*, Fall-Winter 2017-18; KUTV-2 News, September 21 and October 2; *uen.org*, October 1 and October 19; *ksl.com*, October 6; *Denver Post*, October 10; *oif.ala.org*, October 12; *clicweb.org*, October 23.

Fort Myers, Florida

Fort Myers High School removed *City of Thieves*, a novel by David Benioff, one of the creators of HBO's *Game of Thrones*, from the 10th grade curriculum. The 2008 historical coming-of-age novel was removed from the curriculum in October, following a parent's complaint that it contains explicit language and depictions of sexual violence.

The book was one of eight texts chosen for the high school's 10th grade curriculum, each of which were then randomly assigned to a select number of students. Parents were granted time to assess the appropriateness of their students' assigned books and invited to raise any concerns. No concerns were expressed about *City of Thieves* until after this period had ended.

The Florida Education Defenders, a group of education and free expression advocates led by the National Coalition Against Censorship, has written to Lee County school officials to voice opposition to their removal of the acclaimed novel. Reported in *NCAC.org*, October 19.

Emporia, Kansas

Right before the start of Banned Books Week, an English teacher at



Waverly High School in Emporia was suspended from his job for considering teaching Sherman Alexie's novel, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. The Lebo-Waverly Unified School District 243 suspended Austin Schopper from teaching for nine days starting September 11. Parents also complained about his thinking about teaching *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl*, by Jesse Andrews.

Alexie's book, which first came into print in 2007 and won the National Book Award, has frequently drawn attention "for acknowledging issues such as poverty, alcoholism and sexuality," according to the American Library Association's website, and has been challenged in school curriculums because of profanity and situations that were deemed sexually explicit.

Schopper said he wanted to teach the book because he read it while earning his degree at Emporia State University, and thought it was a great book that helps young people see that other people have faced the same issues.

He had taught the book in the past, though not at Waverly.

Schopper said he came in expecting the situation to be similar—that he'd be able to teach the book. But that wasn't the case, he quickly learned.

"The school just kind of determined, what I'm told was in response to some parent concerns, that we weren't going to be teaching it," he said.

He said he was fine with this.

Schopper said none of his students have ever expressed an issue with the books by Alexie and Andrews.

He said *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl* "is consistently the only book that I've ever taught that we've had a 100 percent completion rate with our juniors," he said. "We had the most students ask to re-read it or re-check

it out and that book, until this year, I'd never had a problem with."

Schopper added, "I don't want it to look like the school's the bad guy here. Some people were upset and the school was just kind of like, 'Well, OK, we'll try to make everybody happy.' I just want to make that very clear—I don't blame the school."

While Schopper was unwilling to talk about his feelings about the district's decision to suspend him, he did talk about banned books in general, specifically referencing an article written by Alexie. His summary of Alexie's point is that "if our goal is to educate students and to teach them the value of literature, then we need to speak to them where they're at," he said. "We can't pretend like the issues that our students already go through don't exist. I can't imagine that there's a class that doesn't have a family member that struggles with addiction or mental health or . . . poverty."

This is Schopper's second year as a teacher at Waverly.

USD 243 Superintendent Corey Reese said he was unable to discuss the suspension, for confidentiality reasons. Reported in: *Emporia Gazette*, October 3.

Scituate, Massachusetts

Monster by Walter Dean Myers, a young adult novel written in the form of a screenplay by a teenaged protagonist who has been charged with murder, contains language, violence, and sexual overtures that make it inappropriate for seventh and eighth grade students, Scituate school administrators decided on October 1.

The decision of school administration to remove *Monster* from the middle school curriculum caused an outcry. Opponents to this decision felt it was censorship. The majority of those who spoke at the October 1 meeting

were adamantly against the removal of the book from that grade level.

Assistant Superintendent Jennifer Arnold explained that after listening to the concerns of the parents, she felt *Monster* was inappropriate for eighth graders. "It wasn't just because a parent or a couple of parents wanted this pulled, I wouldn't do that," she said, adding she had broached the issue to other members of school administration. "We made the decision as a team. I was under the impression it would be the best thing." Reported in: *scituate.wickedlocal.com*, October 5.

Warren, New Jersey

Some parents asked for the removal of *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*, a graphic memoir by Alison Bechdel, from the 12th grade curriculum at Watchung Hills Regional High School in Warren Township. After hearing from parents, alumni, and others, who voiced opposition and support for the book, the board of education on June 19 voted for a "compromise" in which *Fun Home* is retained in the curriculum, but as one of several options students may read.

Watchung Hills had added *Fun Home* after a two-year review, to be the last in a four-year series of graphic works that are being included in the curriculum.

Published in 2006, Alison Bechdel's book includes themes of sexual orientation, suicide, gender roles, emotional abuse, and dysfunctional family life. The protagonist uses literature to further delve into an understanding of self and family. Besides the content of the words, it was a few of the book's images which especially upset several parents, who deemed it "explicit" and "pornographic."

In support of the book, the National Coalition Against Censorship (which includes the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, American



Booksellers for Free Expression, the American Library Association, the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, and the National Council of Teachers of English) sent a letter to the school board prior to its June meeting, saying:

We urge you to base your decisions on pedagogical motives, rather than yielding to ideologically motivated pressures from some groups or parents. Our legal system recognizes images, like words, as symbolic expression protected by the First Amendment. Removing *Fun Home* simply because some parents dislike a few illustrations in the book would be constitutionally suspect. . . .

While the book does contain a few images that some may find sexually explicit, these images are an integral part of the larger narrative. *Booklist* has recommended *Fun Home* for young adult readers, noting that the “the very few incidental sex scenes” are “non-prurient” and that “the family story rings utterly and movingly true.” . . . Some parents may still find their children are not yet mature enough to appreciate the literary and artistic value of *Fun Home*. We encourage you to offer them alternative assignments, rather than removing *Fun Home* from the curriculum and thereby denying all students the opportunity to read and learn from its pages.

Reported in: ncac.org, June 4; mycentraljersey.com, June 12; *Echoes-Sentinel*, June 21.

Rockingham County, North Carolina

Beartown by Fredrick Backman has been removed from the required reading list in a sophomore honors English class at McMichael High School after parents objected to “vulgarity” in the

novel about a junior ice hockey team in a small town torn apart by accusations related to a violent act.

The school board told parents in October that a new English teacher at the high school picked the book without the standard approvals from the principal and a review committee.

The book, published in April 2017, was a *Publishers Weekly* bestseller. Reported in: *Herald-Sun*, October 9.

Howard, Ohio

A fifth grade teacher at East Knox Elementary School was disciplined for giving a student *Forever*, a young adult novel by Judy Blume, to read.

Superintendent Steve Larcomb placed Maria Eaton on paid leave for more than two weeks beginning on September 19. Larcomb said that he conducted an investigation after a parent of one of Eaton’s students complained about language in the book. When he looked into the matter, he concluded that the book was not appropriate for fifth graders, and he notified Eaton that she would be placed on paid leave immediately.

Eaton was not allowed on school grounds during her leave, according to the notice sent to Eaton from Larcomb. She was also not permitted to discuss “the events that led to this leave” with school board members, parents or students during that time. Reported in *Knox Pages*, October 7.

Charleston County, South Carolina

Police have spoken out against *The Hate U Give*, by Angie Thomas, and *All American Boys*, by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely, on a summer reading list for Wando High School’s English I class in Charleston County, South Carolina, raising concerns about police involvement in school curricula.

Both award-winning, bestselling young adult books explore themes of racism and police brutality, issues that are relevant to the lives of many youth and young adults, especially in black communities. According to the president of the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) Tri-County Lodge #3, *The Hate U Give* and *All American Boys* encourage “distrust of police,” and the law enforcement union wants the two texts removed from the reading list.

“Whether it be through social media, whether it be through text message, whether it be phone calls, we’ve received an influx of tremendous outrage at the selections by this reading list,” lodge president Jon Blackmon told local news channel News 2. “Freshmen, they’re at the age where their interactions with law enforcement have been very minimal. They’re not driving yet, they haven’t been stopped for speeding, they don’t have these type of interactions. This is putting in their minds, it’s almost an indoctrination of distrust of police and we’ve got to put a stop to that.”

He added, “There are other socio-economic topics that are available and they want to focus half of their effort on negativity towards the police? That seems odd to me.”

Neither of the books are mandatory reading—the list includes eight books, and students only have to select two.

The response from the FOP, one of the largest police organizations in the country, raises concerns for school librarians about censorship and for members of the Charleston community. This is the same city where white police officer Michael Slager fired eight shots at Walter Scott while he ran away, striking him five times in total and three times in the back, in 2015. The officer was prosecuted and convicted, with a 20-year sentence, for an on-duty shooting. That same



year, white supremacist Dylann Roof walked into a Charleston church and massacred nine black parishioners, and after police apprehended Roof, they bought him a Burger King meal.

Poet Marjory Wentworth teaches a college course on banned books at the Art Institute of Charleston. She told *Salon* that “these are exactly the kinds of books we need to be reading and the conversations we need to be having.” She added that Blackmon’s depiction of the two books as anti-police is a miscategorization. “The idea that this is a one-dimensional, anti-police book, just, it’s inaccurate,” Wentworth said.

The Hate U Give was inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement and tells the story of a teenage girl who sees the police shoot her unarmed best friend. Beyond the nuanced exploration of police brutality and its wide-reaching effects on a community, the protagonist’s uncle is a black police officer and a positive influence in her life. The acclaimed bestseller has been turned into a movie, which premiered this fall.

All American Boys follows a teenage boy trying to grapple with the aftermath following an incident with the police where he is falsely accused of shoplifting and then brutally beaten by a police officer.

School librarian and South Carolina Association of School Librarians president Heather Thore wrote: “I encourage everyone who is worried about these books to actually read them, and even talk to teens about their impressions of the books.” She wondered why the police union’s first reaction was to ban or to remove the books, rather than read and discuss them with the students.

Blackmon’s stance that literature or art can sour young people on the police is also misguided, according to author Mychal Denzel Smith. “The

idea that people are planting this idea of the police in children’s heads as opposed to children observing the world and seeing police for who they are, what they actually do, is completely off-base,” said Smith, author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Invisible Man, Got the Whole World Watching*. “[Black] children have had interactions with the police, whether the police want to admit to this or not. It starts way earlier than when they can drive,” he continued. “They know family members who have been arrested. They’ve been in cars that have been stopped, if they weren’t driving them themselves. All of this stuff is in the lives of black children.”

Wando High School Principal Dr. Sherry Eppelsheimer wrote in a statement that “A ‘Request for Reconsideration of Instruction Materials’ form has been submitted and the school and District will follow the procedures outlined in Policy IJKAA-R in connection with the reconsideration request.”

The policy instructs that a committee be formed to review the material and to hear from the parent who complained, the assigning teacher, and other experts. A recommendation is provided to the Superintendent, who can accept or reject it. A final decision is made by the Board of Trustees. Reported in: *salon.com*, July 11.

Austin, Texas

History curriculum in Texas remembers the Alamo but considered forgetting Hillary Clinton and Helen Keller. As part of an effort to “streamline” the social studies curriculum in public schools, the State Board of Education voted on September 14 to adjust what students in every grade are required to learn in the classroom. Among the changes, board members approved the removal of several

historical figures, including Clinton and Keller, from the curriculum.

On November 16, the board voted to keep Clinton and Keller in the curriculum.

The board also voted in November to keep in the curriculum a reference to the “heroism” of the defenders of the Alamo, which had been recommended for elimination. Also retained were Moses’ influence on the writing of the nation’s founding documents, multiple references to “Judeo-Christian” values and a requirement that students explain how the Arab rejection of the State of Israel has contributed to ongoing conflict in the Middle East.

High schoolers have been required to learn about Clinton, who was the first woman to win a major political party’s presidential nomination, in history class. Under a section about citizenship, students were assigned to “evaluate the contributions of significant political and social leaders in the United States” including her, plus Andrew Carnegie, Thurgood Marshall, and Sandra Day O’Connor.

Barry Goldwater was also removed from this teaching requirement. A work group tasked with the curriculum streamlining also recommended removing evangelist and Baptist pastor Billy Graham, but the state board kept him.

Third-grade social studies teachers have been required to educate kids about the life of Keller, who despite being deaf and blind graduated from college and lived a life of activism and authorship.

Removing figures like these from the curriculum doesn’t forbid them from being taught, but just means they’re no longer mandatory. Also, the streamlining of the curriculum won’t affect textbooks or other instructional material, which the board is not updating at this time.



The *Dallas Morning News* spoke with two teachers from the group of board-nominated volunteers that made the recommendations. Both said the state required students to learn about so many historical figures that it resulted in rote memorization of dates and names instead of real learning.

The 15-member work group came up with a rubric for grading every historical figure to rank who is “essential” to learn and who isn’t. The formula asked questions like, “Did the person trigger a watershed change?”; “Was the person from an underrepresented group?”; and “Will their impact stand the test of time?”

Out of 20 points, Keller scored a 7 and Clinton scored a 5. Eliminating Keller from the requirements could save teachers 40 minutes of instructional time, the work group estimated, and eliminating Clinton could save 30 minutes. (Students in that grade are still required to learn about former President Bill Clinton’s impeachment.)

By contrast, local members of the Texas Legislature (whom fourth-graders learn about) got a perfect score, as did Barbara Jordan, Sam Houston, Stephen F. Austin, and Henry B. González. President Donald Trump isn’t included in the list by name, but students are required to learn about the current president, governor, and mayor.

Each year, the board discusses and debates new classroom standards for Texas’ 5.4 million schoolchildren. Its members, currently five Democrats and ten Republicans, are elected to four-year terms and represent specific geographic areas.

The board’s process has always garnered attention—and often controversy. Five years ago, members clashed over whether science books should have to teach an alternative to evolution. In 2014, math standards

were revised, drawing criticism from parents and teachers. And earlier this year, a new Mexican-American studies course was the subject of the latest culture war. Reported in: *Dallas News*, September 14, November 16.

Prosper, Texas

At Prosper High School, a principal who had been at the school for less than a year in February 2018 began reviewing content of the student newspaper, the *Eagle Nation Online*, prior to publication, and blocked some content that did not meet his standards. In May, Prosper High School Principal John Burdett terminated the contract of school newspaper adviser Lori Oglesbee-Petter, who has advised student papers for more than three decades.

First Amendment advocates have called on the school district to end the censorship and are hoping for new legislation that will give more independence to student journalists in Texas.

In several incidents when Burdett forced the *Eagle Nation Online* to remove content, the issue was how the articles might affect the school’s public image. He vetted the newspaper for material that was controversial or ran counter to “community norms.” He sought content that was “uplifting.”

“If you’re trying to defend a story that may be a little vulgar or have tones of sexual innuendo, that’s one thing,” said Oglesbee-Petter, the former adviser. “That’s not what we’re talking about here. This is about stories that set out to improve the schools.”

Burdett did not respond to an email seeking an interview.

Oglesbee-Petter said a statewide speech protection bill would be “protection against someone who is not familiar with the role of the press or Constitutional rights.”

The Student Press Law Center (SPLC) on May 31 sent a letter to Prosper Independent School District Superintendent Drew Watkins, asking that he take steps to ensure the district complies with Constitutional requirements regarding free speech. It was signed by 17 news groups, including the American Society of News Editors, the Society for Professional Journalists, and the Freedom of the Press Foundation.

“School administrators must remove themselves from reviewing student journalism that involves the image or reputation of the school, as the administration faces an ethical conflict in serving as both the subject of news coverage and its editor,” the letter said.

The district declined to comment.

SPLC is hopeful the incident will encourage a state lawmaker to introduce a measure that has had mixed success around the United States. Frank LoMonte, a senior law fellow at the Student Press Law Center, said in an email, “the Prosper situation is so outrageous that it’s the poster-child case that could fuel reform.”

Fourteen states have laws protecting high school journalists. Reported in: *Texas Monitor*, June 4.

Jordan, Utah

The Things They Carried, a collection of short stories by Tim O’Brien about the Vietnam War, has been approved, but still faces a challenge at the Bingham High School in the Jordan School District.

The book was not required reading, but was on a list of approved books for a senior class. The teacher warned the class that the book contained realistic dialog common among soldiers, including 72 instances of the “f word.”

Lori Martinsen, parent of a senior at the school, said she will be



contesting the book and asked, “Is it appropriate for those kinds of details, for that kind of language, for that level of sexuality in it to be taught to minors in a public school setting? My daughter could not legally walk into a movie with a glimpse of what is in this book.”

In the Jordan School District, the review process for contested books begins in November. Reported in: abc4.com, September 19.

Burlington, Vermont

Burlington High School principal Noel Green may have violated state law when he ordered student journalists to take down a story posted to the school newspaper’s website.

On September 10, a Monday night, the website of the *Register* (the student newspaper) broke the news that the state has been investigating school guidance director Mario Macias, who is accused of unprofessional conduct and could lose his educator’s license for nearly a year.

By Tuesday morning, Green ordered the *Register*’s teacher adviser, Beth Fialko Casey, to pull the article. Fialko Casey conferred with the article’s four authors—editors Julia Shannon-Grillo, Halle Newman, Nataleigh Noble, and Jenna Peterson—who reluctantly agreed to comply.

“It did cross our minds that they’d want to talk to us and we were ready to defend our actions but we were not expecting it to be censored,” said Shannon-Grillo, a 16-year-old junior. “We understand [Green’s] decision, but as editors, we don’t agree with it.”

By Tuesday afternoon, September 11, several local media outlets had confirmed and reported on the story the *Register* broke. The student newspaper’s article, meanwhile, had been replaced with a blank page and the headline: “This article has been

censored by Burlington High School administration.”

“In my opinion, [the article] created a hostile work environment for one of my employees,” Green said in an interview. “I would react the same way for any of my employees.”

Green’s order to pull the story appears to be in direct conflict with a law signed in May 2017 that was meant to protect student journalists from administrative meddling. For any decision to censor, Act 49 maintains that school administrators must provide “lawful justification without undue delay.”

“Content shall not be suppressed solely because it involves political or controversial subject matter, or is critical of the school or its administration,” the law reads. Certain information is not protected, including libelous and slanderous material, and stories deemed an “unwarranted invasion of privacy.”

“I think the students have a very strong case that their rights are being violated,” said state Sen. Phil Baruth, who helped shepherd the legislation through as chair of the Senate Education Committee. “I think the principal, with a little bit of time to reflect, would do well to put the article back up.”

Shannon-Grillo said she and the other student journalists spent Tuesday morning calling local law firms and representatives from the Student Press Law Center to get clarification about their legal rights. When they couldn’t get in touch with anyone, they agreed to temporarily pull the story. They worried Green would discipline Fialko Casey.

“We didn’t see why it needed to be taken down,” Shannon-Grillo said. “It was public information.”

What they didn’t know at the time was that Act 49 also protects newspaper advisers from discipline when

they take “reasonable and appropriate action to protect a student journalist for engaging in conduct protected” by the law.

Fialko Casey is familiar with Act 49. Student journalists at Burlington High School, who had been subject to strict administrative editorial oversight, had helped get it enacted. Fialko Casey and then-student editors posed for photos with Governor Phil Scott in May 2017 as he signed the bill into law.

In this instance, Fialko Casey said, she left it up to the students to decide whether to comply with Green’s order or not. While she knew about protections provided by the law, she didn’t know what repercussions she or the students would face if they refused to listen to the principal. She said she promised to support the students in whatever decision they made.

“I’m just a mentor,” Fialko Casey said. “They have control of the paper and can take or leave my advice. I’m not the editor. It’s not my newspaper.”

After taking the story down, Fialko Casey met with Green for 70 minutes. The two argued and debated the censorship and left the meeting still in disagreement. Fialko Casey said Green had a copy of Act 49 in front of him. She said he felt his decision to pull the article was in keeping with the law.

“Unfortunately, the censorship stood,” Fialko Casey said. “He would not let us put it back up, so we did not win the battle but we live to fight another day.” Reported in: *Seven Days*, September 12, September 13.

Albemarle County, Virginia

The Albemarle County School Board’s meeting on August 30 had a free-speech issue on the agenda, while other free-speech issues emerged outside the meeting: the rights of residents to protest and assemble outside



of public meetings, and where those rights potentially end. The controversy inside the meeting was a proposal to change school dress codes to ban Confederate images.

About 50 people assembled outside the public meeting; after a few minutes, their chants and speeches could be heard inside the meeting chambers. A few minutes later, a deputy chief of police began asking protesters to quiet down. When they did not, he then asked them to disperse. When they refused, he began arresting people. After six arrests were made inside and outside Lane Auditorium and police cleared the anteroom, several members of the public and media were initially refused re-entry to the meeting.

“During the initial altercations, it became fairly hectic,” Albemarle police Lieutenant Terry Walls said. “Once things were stabilized and secured, we were able to place some people at the entrances in an attempt to keep people that had been banned from coming back in, because we had witnessed several people who we believe had left that were part of the problem and then tried to re-enter the building.”

A large group was asked to leave the antechamber by County Executive Jeff Richardson, Walls said, and some people tried to re-enter. The police didn’t want people who had been disruptive to return, Walls said. However, he also said that police at the entrance didn’t have a good way to know whom those people might be and could have inadvertently kept non-disruptive members of the public and media out.

All six of the people who were arrested were charged with trespassing; two of the six also were charged with obstruction of justice.

There is precedent for keeping disruptive individuals out of public meetings and for shutting down

protests that are interrupting meetings, several First Amendment scholars say—but it’s not clear if a whole group of people should be ordered out while the meeting continues. Similarly, public buildings are often the sites of protests, but common spaces in those buildings, like lobbies, are not always open to free-speech activities, according to the American Civil Liberties Union of Virginia.

The public generally has the right to observe public meetings—but not necessarily to participate, according to Clay Hansen, executive director of the Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression, an Albemarle-based think tank that advocates for freedom of speech.

“And then if your participation becomes disruptive, you might lose your ability to participate in the meeting,” Hansen said. “Once you cross that line into disruptive comment, you also don’t get a second bite at the apple if you get removed.”

Still, according to Megan Rhyne of the Virginia Coalition for Open Government, a public body probably shouldn’t remove individuals for disruptive conduct, but then continue a meeting while keeping out a whole group of people. “While there is some precedent for removing disruptive individuals, I don’t think it is proper to keep out certain segments of the population,” Rhyne wrote in an email. “Otherwise, it’s not a meeting open to ‘the public’ under [the Freedom of Information Act].”

In a statement after the meeting and in a letter to the editor published in the *Daily Progress*, School Board Chairwoman Kate Acuff indicated that she viewed the wearing of Confederate symbols as hurtful but protected speech, and that ongoing disruptions of public meetings would be met with requests to leave and, potentially, arrests.

The group that organized the protest, the Hate-Free Schools Coalition, released a statement the next day saying the protest was merely an effort to be heard after the group felt the board remained unresponsive to requests to amend the county schools’ dress code to include a ban on Confederate images.

“Because the board shut down our scheduled 8/23 opportunity, we were determined to be heard on 8/30,” the group wrote, referencing a previous meeting that ended after one public comment. “When the board tried to silence our voices yet again by removing public comment from the agenda, we called a community gathering for the same time as the board meeting. We refused to muzzle ourselves, and then the board ordered the police to either intimidate us into silence or arrest us. We did not back down.”

The board has said it plans to continue working on its nondiscrimination policies and hopes to finalize a new policy by the end of the year. Reported in: *The Daily Progress*, August 31.

Smithfield, Virginia

A parent of a Smithfield High School freshman took her child to an open house at the beginning of the school year and found what she considers homosexual pornography that was viewed through the school’s online research database. The school blocked the site pending an investigation.

Diana Elswick, an IT professional by trade, was looking up the school’s technology policy on the Smithfield High School website and ended up on the student zone where she found the Gale Virtual Library—an online resource available to school districts in Virginia.

One of the topic areas offered by Gale is “Gender Studies Collection,” which included articles from *The*



Advocate, a gay and lesbian publication. Photos with some articles included nude men.

“That first picture, I was shocked,” said Elswick of one of the photos. Elswick went on to create a video of how she found the material and alerted school officials.

The *Smithfield Times* was also able to access the material via the Smithfield Middle School webpage. Reported in: WAVY, September 4, *Smithfield Times*, September 5.

Cedarburg, Wisconsin

Drama by Raina Telgemeier was restricted by the Cedarburg School District near the end of the 2017-18 school year, as inappropriate for younger children.

A letter to the editor in a local newspaper said the district “needs a more rigorous review process when a couple of parents and four committee members ban *Drama* by Raina Telgemeier.” In her brief letter, Maureen O’Brien of Cedarburg wrote, “Banning a book is more dangerous than allowing a child to read a book that might challenge his or her thinking. . . . Being able to read any book is a safe way for a child to learn about the real world.”

The minutes of the Cedarburg School Board meetings show that its Materials Review Committee met on June 11 and June 14 to consider moving the book from the Parkview Elementary School library to Webster Middle School, or to allow only 5th graders at the elementary school to check out the book. The minutes with the committee’s decision were not posted.

An online search uncovered no further details about the challenge in Cedarburg. The graphic novel, about the on- and off-stage drama of students in a middle school theater production, has frequently been banned

or challenged since its publication in 2012. Reported in: boarddocs.com /wi/cedar, June 14; *Ozaukee Press*, July 11.

Cody, Wyoming

Parent complaints against *A Bad Boy Can Be Good for a Girl* by Tanya Lee Stone and other proposed classroom reading materials and library books at the Cody School District will be reviewed later this school year. The Cody School Board on September 18 voted to keep the book on the shelf until the review is completed, and approved four new community members and three alternates to round out the nine-person KEC committee tasked with reviewing complaints on materials.

The committee is made up of five patrons or parents from the community, three teachers, and a district administrator.

Some trustees wanted books removed when they are challenged, but the majority overruled them.

“Things have changed in the last four months,” trustee Stefanie Bell said. “We have a notification system for parents and we have a district librarian who said she will back parents 100 percent. I think the best solutions are going to come with the parent sitting down with the librarian, or librarian and administrator, and they see their parental role is respected.”

District librarian Jennison Lucas has said previously she would sit down with any parent with a complaint and work to make sure their children are not able to access whatever books the parent does not want the child to check out.

The changes stem from the last time the KEC committee reviewed a complaint on a library book. The complaint went through KEC, which voted 7-2 not to remove the book, although it also said it didn’t have the

proper guidelines to judge a library book. The trustees later decided to weigh in, voting 5-1 in February to remove the book.

At that time, the school immediately implemented Alexandria library software to notify parents of books being checked out from district libraries by their children. It includes an opt-out for parents who do not wish to be notified.

Chair Kelly Simone has pointed to the notification system as a key way parents now have a greater say in what their children check out, thus limiting the need of a policy that’s too restrictive.

Lucas said the policy at her school libraries will be backed up by a constant review process of books. Beyond complaints, books could be removed for being worn, obsolete, unneeded or a variety of other reasons. Reported in: *Cody Enterprise*, September 19.

COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES Kansas City, Kansas

Free speech advocates are protesting the University of Kansas’ decision to remove a controversial American flag marked with paint following complaints from Kansas Governor Jeff Colyer and other Republican politicians that the public art piece was disrespectful.

“It is unfortunate that the University of Kansas appears to have bowed to pure political pressure in its display of the art installation, ‘Untitled (Flag 2),’” declared Micah Kubic, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Kansas, in a statement. “You do not need to like the art, or agree with the political sentiments it expresses, or even believe that it expresses any political idea at all to recognize that the artwork is protected by the First Amendment.”



An American flag marked with black paint had flown atop a flagpole outside KU's Spooner Hall since July 5 as part of a public arts project sponsored by the New York City-based arts nonprofit Creative Time.

The flag's creator, German artist Josephine Meckseper, had depicted a black-and-white sock and a split United States using a drip painting technique. She said her piece was intended as a call to unite a deeply polarized country.

But the flag was taken down July 11, hours after Colyer and Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach called for its removal. Colyer—who faced Kobach in August's GOP primary—had called the piece a “disrespectful display of a desecrated American flag,” and other conservatives, including Kansas congressional candidate Steve Watkins, expressed disapproval.

KU Chancellor Doug Girod said in a statement that safety concerns prompted university officials to move the flag to an exhibit in KU's Spencer Museum of Art. He did not elaborate on what those safety concerns were.

The decision “smacks of censorship,” the ACLU's Kubic said. “The elected officials in question, including Governor Colyer and Secretary Kobach, have been very clear that they want the art censored because of the political statement it makes, and the way in which it makes that statement,” he said. “That is an affront to the spirit of the First Amendment, and the values for which the flag stands.”

Other free speech advocates released statements as well.

Peter Bonilla, vice president of programs at the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), called for the university not to take down the flag, and stand “apart from the numerous institutions that have censored artistic expression.” He said, “The First Amendment doesn't exist

to protect politically popular speech. It exists to protect the speech likeliest to stir controversy, and it is a crucial check against the power of the state to silence dissenting voices.”

Copies of Meckseper's work are simultaneously being displayed across the United States. It is the last in a series of flags created for “Pledges of Allegiances,” in which Creative Time commissioned 16 artists to create flags highlighting various causes.

The Spencer Museum of Art and KU Commons inside Spooner hosted the privately funded project and displayed 15 other flags on the Spooner flagpole since November. Meckseper's flag was expected to fly until July 31.

Creative Time issued a statement after the flag had been taken down. “Art has a responsibility to drive hard conversations,” the statement read. “‘Pledges of Allegiance’ was begun to generate dialogue and bring attention to the pressing issues of the day. The right to freedom of speech is one of our nation's most dearly held values. It is also under attack. We are proud to stand by artists who express themselves. Today's events illustrate the same divisions in our country that the series has confronted head-on.”

National Coalition Against Censorship joined the FIRE and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Kansas in a letter to the University of Kansas (KU) strongly urging it to take a stand against censorship by restoring a public artwork that the university removed. The joint letter reminds KU that as a public institution it is obligated to protect the First Amendment rights of its students and faculty.

The letter cites statements from both Colyer and Kobach that publicly-funded institutions should not “promote” this type of art, but argues that, in fact, it is precisely public institutions like KU that are bound by

the US Constitution to not censor. Reported in: *Kansas City Star*, July 12; ncac.org, July 16.

St. George, Utah

After a complaint from a group that tracks what it sees as violations of the separation of church and state, the state-owned Southern Utah University removed all copies of the *Bible* and the *Book of Mormon* from guest rooms at Dixie State Inn, a hotel associated with the university.

The Freedom from Religion Foundation alerted Dixie State's president about the issue in June. The group reminded Dixie that the establishment clause of US Constitution's First Amendment forbids public schools from promoting, endorsing, or advancing any religion.

The university president then turned it over to the school's lawyers to consider. After an in-depth analysis by Alison Vicroy, the university's assistant general counsel, the school asked the inn to take the religious texts out of individual guest rooms.

That was “an appropriate course of action,” Dixie State spokeswoman Jyl Hall said. “The university doesn't want either the appearance or the reality of advancing one religion over another.”

Copies of the *Bible* and *Book of Mormon* (the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints scripture) are still available at the front desk. Reported in: *Salt Lake Tribune*, October 1.

MILITARY BASES Cheyenne, Wyoming; Okinawa, Hawaii

In one response to a campaign by the Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF), the commander of Warren Air Force Base in Cheyenne, Wyoming, Colonel Stacy Jo Huser, removed the *Bible* from a POW-MIA display.



The MRFF has sought to remove religious articles from POW/MIA “Missing Man” tables at US military bases for years, with mixed results. MRFF lawyers argue that the First Amendment not only forbids the government from establishing an official religion but also prohibits government actions that favor one religion over another.

The official Navy or Defense Department stance on Bibles being included in POW/MIA “Missing Man” table displays remains unclear. However, a report on the Navy’s website from 2014 describes the *Bible* as being an official part of the display.

In Wyoming, Col. Huser issued a statement that said she just didn’t want to offend those of religions other than Christianity. “One of our focus areas,” she said, “is increasing the sense of belonging for all our airmen; a large part of that effort is ensuring the religious and non-religious feel included and cared for. . . . [The 90th Missile Wing will] replace the *Bible* on the POW/MIA table with a ‘book of faith’ containing scriptural writings and prayers from the five DOD chaplain-appointed faith groups, and a sixth set of blank pages to represent those who find solace by other means.”

MRFF was less successful with a complaint against the POW/MIA display at the US Naval Hospital in Okinawa, Hawaii. MRFF first filed a complaint about the Okinawa display with Rear Adm. Paul Pearigen, Navy Medicine West commander, on April 5. The Navy later said it investigated the matter but found that including the *Bible* was “consistent with Department of the Navy and Department of Defense guidance, as well as the US Constitution.”

On June 26, the MRFF appealed that decision. The updated complaint asked the inspector general of the US

Navy to remove the *Bible* of the book from the display, and also to eliminate language about the *Bible* and the phrase “one nation under God” from an accompanying explanatory placard. The complaint also called for an investigation into how the book came to be displayed, who authorized it, and “appropriate disciplinary measures administered to those responsible.”

By mid-September, there were no reports of any action taken by the Navy inspector general on this complaint.

Earlier, MRFF forced the Denver Veterans Administration Medical Center to remove religious items from a display in November. Reported in: *Stars and Stripes*, June 27; *Washington Times*, August 4.

SOCIAL MEDIA Mountain View, California

President Donald Trump on August 28 issued a stark warning to tech giants including Google, Facebook, and Twitter, accusing them of muzzling conservatives and saying they are “treading on very, very troubled territory.”

“I think Google has really taken advantage of a lot of people. It’s a very serious thing,” Trump told reporters at a White House event. “If you look at what is going on at Twitter, if you look at what is going on in Facebook, they better be careful because you can’t do that to people.”

The president spent the day criticizing the tech companies for what he sees as the suppression of conservative voices. Earlier in the day, the president posted a series of tweets accusing Google of treating certain political ideologies unfairly. The presidents said the search giant is “rigged” to show users “bad” stories about him.

“Google search results for ‘Trump News’ shows only the viewing/reporting of Fake New Media. In

other words, they have it RIGGED, for me & others, so that almost all stories & news is BAD. Fake CNN is prominent. Republican/Conservative & Fair Media is shut out,” Trump wrote online.

The president appeared to be referencing an article from PJ Media, a conservative blog founded in the early 2000s. The article, published over the weekend two days before the president made the same complaints about Google, features a pie chart that says it breaks down “Google search results for ‘Trump’” by party bias. Only a sliver of the pie chart, which encompasses the *Wall Street Journal*, is red. The rest of the chart, marked in blue, is made up of outlets PJ media accused of being “left-leaning,” including the *New York Times*, CNN, the *Washington Post* and Politico.

Google is among the tech giants that have drawn the ire of the president and his conservative base. The previous week, Trump blasted Facebook and Twitter for “silencing millions of people.” Google said in a statement that its search feature is “not used to set a political agenda.”

“We don’t bias our results toward any political ideology,” a Google spokesperson said. “Every year, we issue hundreds of improvements to our algorithms to ensure they surface high-quality content in response to users’ queries. We continually work to improve Google Search and we never rank search results to manipulate political sentiment.”

Neither Trump nor the PJ media article offered any proof that Google was purposely promoting negative stories about the president at the expense of positive ones. Many news outlets specifically tailor their online content to match Google’s search algorithms in an effort to appear at or near the top of search results.



On Twitter, the president wrote: “Illegal? 96% of results on ‘Trump News’ are from National Left-Wing Media, very dangerous. Google & others are suppressing voices of Conservatives and hiding information and news that is good. They are controlling what we can & cannot see. This is a very serious situation—will be addressed!”

Trump did not elaborate on what steps he might take against Google, although White House economic adviser Larry Kudlow told reporters the administration is “taking a look” at imposing regulations on Google.

Trump’s attacks on August 28 marked a continuation of his long-running feud with media outlets and tech companies that he claims offer him unfairly negative coverage.

“We have tremendous—we have literally thousands and thousands of complaints coming in and you just can’t do that, so I think that Google and Twitter and Facebook, they’re really treading on very very troubled territory and they have to be careful. It’s not fair to large portions of the population,” Trump said later on the same day. Reported in: politico.com, August 28.

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS Washington, DC

CNN’s Kaitlan Collins was punished by the White House for doing her job as the television pool reporter at an Oval Office photo opportunity on July 25. The aggressive retaliation by government officials drew outrage from journalists, rival networks, and the White House Correspondents Association.

Collins called out questions to President Trump about his former lawyer’s taping of conversations and Vladimir Putin’s failure to accept an invitation to Washington. Calling out questions is common practice among

White House reporters. Trump declined to answer the questions, which is his right. But then, Collins says, she was called before Press Secretary Sarah Sanders and newly appointed deputy chief of staff Bill Shine and told that she would not be allowed to attend an open press event in the Rose Garden later in the day.

Apparently, the White House officials have decided that singling out CNN won’t hurt them. On President Trump’s recent European trip, he attacked CNN unprompted at a press conference in the UK, refused to answer a question from the network’s Jim Acosta, and pivoted to Fox News’s John Roberts, saying, “Let’s go to a real network.” The White House later pulled national security advisor John Bolton from a scheduled appearance on CNN as retaliation for what it said was “bad behavior.”

According to the *Columbia Journalism Review*,

The outrage from journalists to Collins’s banning was palpable, but in order to have an impact they must also make it clear to the public why this story matters beyond the understandable anger and frustration from CNN. . . . The real reason why this is significant is that Trump’s constant attacks on the press—so regular that they barely register anymore—have now been backed by concrete action from his minions. As with any number of individual incidents involving this administration and the media, the specific action won’t hasten the end of the free press as we know it, but the sum of Trump’s deliberate attempts to undermine trust in journalism has long-lasting consequences.

Reported in: *Columbia Journalism Review*, July 26.

DRAG QUEEN STORYTIMES

EDITOR’S NOTE: “Drag Queen Storytimes” is a new department in JIFP News. This is a rapidly growing area of controversy that is different from other censorship in JIFP’s established “Censorship Dateline” department, as the challenges generally target not specific titles nor specific speakers, but rather the method in which stories are presented to children. When such challenges result in court cases, they will be mentioned in this department, with further details in the “From the Bench” department.

Libraries

MOBILE, ALABAMA

Hundreds of children crowded the auditorium at the Ben Ray Main Library in Mobile for the city’s first Drag Queen Story Hour on September 8. Former Tuscaloosa resident Wade Brasfield, in his stage drag persona of “Ms. Khloe Kash,” read two books for the young crowd, *The Rainbow Fish*, by Marcus Pfister, about a fish who looks different from the others, and *Stella Brings the Family*, by Miriam B. Schiffer, which is about a little girl who must decide which of her two dads to bring to a Mother’s Day event.

Supporters of the readings outnumbered opponents, with barricades set up by local police to separate them. Demonstrators in favor of the reading event carried signs with slogans like “I’m going to tolerate the heck out of you,” while critics carried placards with messages including “your lifestyle isn’t for my children.”

Opposition organizer Lou Campomenosi says his group isn’t anti-gay. “The long and the short of it is this we just think this isn’t an age appropriate reading for kids aged three to eight years old,” said Campomenosi. “And, I think that is our biggest concern, and I think for the community



not to hear an opposing view isn't a good thing."

The local LGBTQ support group Rainbow Mobile arranged for the event through the local library board.

Drag Queen Story Time ended without incident or arrests.

Brasfield feels he would have benefited from a drag queen story time when he was young and said he had difficulty dealing with intolerance at school. In an interview with Alabama Public Radio and the University of Alabama's Center for Public Television prior to the event, Brasfield said he hoped his young audience will realize it's okay to be different.

Prior to the event, representatives from Baptist churches in Mobile and three other speakers spoke in opposition on August 27 at the Mobile County Commission meeting at Government Plaza and at a Mobile City Council meeting on August 28. Rev. Mack Morris, senior pastor at Woodridge Baptist Church, said "Their plan is not a one-time gig at the library but rather it is a carefully crafted political agenda with the idea of infiltrating the public-school system where their immoral teachings shall be used to indoctrinate young children."

Joining him at the County Commission meeting, Rev. Fred Wolfe, a longtime pastor in the Mobile area and founding pastor at Luke 4:18 Fellowship, said his church would still be opposed to reading a story about a family with two dads, inside a public library, even if the reader wasn't dressed as a drag queen.

On August 28, two of the three county commissioners who spoke at the public meeting said there was little they could do to prevent the September 8 event. "The Mobile County Commission really has no authority legal or otherwise over the Mobile Public Library," said Commissioner

Connie Hudson, who expressed her disapproval to library director Scott Kinney, and called the event "inappropriate."

A Mobile Public Library spokesperson said the library is not supporting the event, and taxpayers' money is not going toward it. She said Rainbow Mobile met all the requirements the library has in place to hold the event.

Mobile Mayor Sandy Stimpson's office also has said the city has little legal authority to interfere.

The library, though, receives a lion's share of its funding through local sources and at least one Mobile County commissioner said the library's budget should be examined. "If there is money wasted on such events, maybe we should figure out if there is too much money being spent," said Commissioner Jerry Carl, who was critical of the American Library Association's role in the event. ALA has supported public libraries' efforts to create programs promoting diversity and inclusive societies.

Amber Guy, spokeswoman with the Mobile Public Library, said the library adheres to ALA's guidelines for making meeting rooms available on equal terms to all groups of people, "regardless of beliefs and affiliations of their members." Reported in: *al.com*, August 23, August 27, August 28; Alabama Public Radio, September 8.

ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

The latest Drag Queen Story Time inside the Loussac Library on November 3 drew some controversy when it was announced in October. A previous Drag Queen Story Time in the same Anchorage library drew a disruptive protestor when it was held on June 9.

The ticketed event was promoted as a celebration of reading, creativity, and acceptance, but at the end of October, Jim Minnery, head

of Christian group Alaska Family Action, sent an email to supporters in which he called such story times "alarming." The email condemned "using taxpayer funded public libraries to talk with impressionable young children about 'gender fluidity.'" He urged people to contact the library and ask that future events be canceled.

Shortly afterward, the library said it received 29 negative comments. Most express concern about normalizing what the senders see as deviant behavior.

But the library said another campaign, organized by Identity Inc., the non-profit that provides support to the LGBT community and which partners with the library for the drag queen story times, had generated 87 emails and comments that are positive about the program.

Library Director Mary Jo Torgeson said the program isn't costing taxpayers anything, because the library doesn't get public funds to pay for its programming. She said operational funds are raised by the nonprofit Friends of the Library group, adding that the drag queens are supplied for free by Identity Inc.

At an earlier Drag Queen Story Time at Loussac Library on June 9, a man who refers to himself as a pastor tried to spread a less tolerant message. Dave Grisham, a self-proclaimed pastor with Last Frontier Evangelism, has made a habit of interrupting events and gatherings which celebrate views he doesn't agree with, to shout his own beliefs. He's known for barging into the local "Santa House in North Pole" to spread a religious message to children in line to see Santa, telling them "Santa isn't real."

On November 3, Grisham video recorded himself crashing the story time, while someone holding a second camera inside the room captured the outburst from the opposite angle.



“Today we’re at the Loussac Public Library where they’re having story time with a drag queen,” he said. “So we are going to go inside and tell the kids the truth, there’s no such thing as transgenders.”

As Grisham enters the room, two drag queens and a drag king are reading a book to a room of children and their parents.

“Hey kids, my name is Pastor David, and I want to tell you there’s no such thing as transgenders,” he interrupted.

Parents in the room quickly forced him to leave, as his message is drowned out with the children’s nursery rhyme, “Wheels on the Bus.”

People who attended the event say the intrusion caught them by surprise and they are thankful the situation didn’t turn violent.

Torgeson said people who don’t wish to have drag queens read to their children don’t have to attend the events. Four more are scheduled for next year, starting in February. Reported in: KTVA, June 10, November 5.

LAFAYETTE, LOUISIANA

A Louisiana library’s Drag Queen Story Time is early October has been postponed indefinitely, and one library official resigned to show his support for the event when it was questioned by Lafayette’s Mayor-President.

The planned story time was supposed to feature male University of Louisiana at Lafayette (UL) students dressed as women, reading books to young children between the ages of three and six. The students are members of a provisional UL chapter of Delta Lambda Phi, which calls itself a fraternity for gay, bisexual, and progressive men.

In its original statement announcing the event, Lafayette Public Library

officials noted that they host dozens of story times every year, and only one will feature drag queens. “The Drag Queen Story Time will share stories of individuality, openness and acceptance with families seeking an opportunity to show their children that every person is unique and should be treated with equal respect,” according to the statement on the library website. Library staff would select the books to be read.

The event was originally scheduled to be held at Lafayette Public Library’s Main Library building on Congress Street in Lafayette. Two days before the event, the library announced that the event would be moved to the nearby community college to accommodate larger crowds. The public library’s auditorium that had been set to hold the event can accommodate 300 people. In addition, Public Library Director Teresa Elberson said, the move was practical due to the “expected disruption to regular Saturday activities at the Main Library.”

One day before the event, the community college also announced that it could not host the story time, partly due to concerns about safety. South Louisiana Community College said in a statement that law enforcement told school officials that opponents of the event planned to demonstrate. The college also said it has a limited capacity to manage the large crowds anticipated, and at least one national organization intended to attend. The college said it cannot increase its limited security because of a state policy that says there can be no direct cost to the school system for such events. There is also a responsibility to students taking classes Saturday to provide a setting conducive to learning, which would be disrupted by the crowds, the college said.

Lafayette Public Library officials said in a statement that they are not

permanently canceling the program despite the need to secure a new host venue, as their administration and board believe in serving a diverse community. They also say many families have expressed support for the event.

Controversy surrounded the story time ever since it was announced roughly two months earlier. Some strong opposition was expressed, but public comments at a Lafayette City-Parish Council meeting in August were overwhelmingly supportive.

Mayor-President Joel Robideaux had registered his opposition to the event with a statement calling for an inquiry into how it became part of the library’s programming. That led to the resignation of Robideaux’s appointee to the library board of directors, Joseph Gordon-Wiltz, who told *The Advocate* he would not “impugn the dignity of any citizen of the Parish of Lafayette.” Gordon-Wiltz, president of the library board, said he didn’t see eye-to-eye with Robideaux on the event.

The mayor-president’s appointee, who must be a Lafayette Consolidated Government employee, is the only library board member who serves at the pleasure of a single individual. The other seven members are collectively appointed by the City-Parish Council.

City-Parish Council members William Theriot and Jared Bellard introduced a resolution calling for the council to formally oppose the event, even though the effect of such a resolution would likely be limited to symbolism. As the seven other council members noted in an August 31 press release, the council has no authority to dictate library operations beyond the appointment of board members.

That press release was careful to note that the council as a whole was



not taking a position for or against the event, though the resolution could force members on one side or another.

The library board listened to public comments, but took no action on the Drag Queen Story Time on September 17, at its last scheduled meeting before the October 6 date that had been set for the story hour.

Reported in: *New York Times*, August 28; *The Advocate*, September 17; KATC/ABC3, October 4; *Lafayette Daily Advertiser*, September 4; Associated Press, October 5.

OLEAN, NEW YORK

“A Drag Queen Kids’ Party,” the first such event at the Olean Public Library, was held June 20. Flo Leeta, a drag queen from Buffalo, read a selection of positive, age-appropriate children’s books as part of Pride Month.

At first, some in the community were divided over the plan, with some threatening to protest, or even cut up their library cards. But those protesters were small in number.

Instead, hundreds packed the library to show their support for Flo Leeta and members of LGBTQ community.

Flo Leeta says her aim is to educate parents and kids about always being proud of who you are. She read *Jacob’s New Dress*, by Sarah and Ian Hofman, and *Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress*, by Christine Baldacchino. Olean Library’s Programs Director Jennifer Stickle said those books have been on the library’s shelves for years.

When the event was announced at the beginning of the month, Stickle said, negative social media posts began trickling in, as well as phone calls to the library and roughly 10 visits by those who wanted to share their disapproval in person. Also, a Pennsylvania leader of the National Socialist (Nazi) Movement announced plans on

social media to protest the event with others.

Stickle said she was inspired to host this reading after seeing news articles about Drag Queen Story Hour, an organization that began in San Francisco in 2015 but has since spread to cities across the country. And because the Olean library’s other programs representing the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community had been embraced over the last few years—including Rainbow Alliance for LGBTQ youth support group, which launched in February 2017—she wanted to see the response to a program for even younger kids.

“It’s just like any other story time program in our library,” she said. “The difference being the person reading the book happens to be dressed in age-appropriate drag and reading picture books that show kids of LGBT families that they’re normal.”

Stickle noted that it was a plus that the performer who brings Flo Leeta to life, Benjamin Berry, has for years hosted multiple events for children as a hula-hoop instructor, entertainer, and drag queen. He is also an Alfred State graduate and now part of the roster of Young Audiences of Western New York, a nonprofit that works to pair teaching artists with opportunities to instruct kids in creative programs.

Flo Leeta—who is not affiliated with Drag Queen Story Hour—said many of those speaking out against her appearance in Olean seem to misunderstand the point of it. She said the purpose is to humanize members of the LGBTQ community and make children comfortable with how they want to express themselves. Reported in: *wkbw*, June 20; *Olean Times-Herald*, June 20.

CLARKSVILLE-MONTGOMERY, TENNESSEE

At Clarksville–Montgomery County Public Library, a local community group—Equality Clarksville—is offering a story time for children that, at times, has featured drag performers. This sparked competing opinion pieces in local newspapers.

Martha Hendricks, director of the county library, wrote in the *Leaf Chronicle* that the public library is neither a sponsor of this story time program nor is collaborating with the group. The group is simply using one of the library’s meeting rooms for its own purposes. “Having said this, however,” she added, “it is the responsibility of your public library to protect the right of local community groups to be able to meet and to pursue their particular agendas.”

She concluded, “Isn’t that the best thing about living in America? We may not always agree with each other, but each of us still has the right to speak up for what we do believe without fear of imprisonment and to pursue in each of our lives, our own particular version of liberty and happiness.”

Meanwhile, *Tennessee Star* political editor Steve Gill put in his newspaper and on his “The Gill Report” broadcast on WETR FM his concern that drag queens read to children as “part of their gender expansion. To try and get into the heads of these kids and teach them that there is no boy thing or no girl thing it’s all just people things . . . trying to blend the genders. Which is part of the agenda of the perverse left.”

He said it is “not age appropriate,” and concluded, “they are doing it in a library in Clarksville Sunday, and they can be doing it in your child’s school within the next few weeks if we don’t pay attention.” Reported in: *Tennessee Star*, August 11; *Leaf Chronicle*, August 13.



HOUSTON, TEXAS

Houston Public Library continues to host drag queen story time events, despite protests, lawsuits, and political campaigns in opposition.

Drag Queen Storytime debuted at the Heights branch of the Houston Public Library in July. Another event in which local drag queens were invited took place at the Fred-Montrose Neighborhood library on a Saturday afternoon, September 29.

Drag Queen Storytime is part of a national program which states that its aim is to promote love and acceptance. However, not everyone sees it that way.

Several people outside the September event protested it as a way to “groom children to be acquainted with these issues.” Protester Cesar Franco said, “This is an abomination. Children should not be sexualized.”

According to organizers, the program is aimed to provide children with positive and unabashedly queer role models. The event also featured a musical number, a photo booth, and various activities for families.

A lawsuit filed September 28 seeks to block drag queen story hours at Houston city libraries (see “From the Bench,” page 45), but the mayor called the suit “frivolous.”

The anti-LGBTQ political action committee behind the lawsuits also used drag queen story hours in political ads to scare Houston-area voters into supporting Republican candidates. The Campaign for Houston PAC aired TV ads and mailed postcards with juxtaposed images of drag queens and crying children.

The Campaign for Houston PAC site has a petition saying that the goal of Drag Queen Story Hour is to “indoctrinate children,” “break the stigma of drag and queer culture with kids” and “normalize this perverted

behavior, so that these children can be more easily recruited into their lifestyle.” Reported in: KTRK/Houston ABC-TV 13, September 29; KHOU-TV 11, October 23; *LGBTQ Nation*, November 3.

Schools

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

Drag Queen Story Hour has been a monthly event at the Brooklyn Public Library, but now the concept is spreading beyond libraries and into a number of schools in New York. The New York City chapter of the non-profit Drag Queen Story Hour (DQSH-NYC) lists two public schools and seven private schools in New York City that have had such story hours.

A promotional PDF on the DQSH-NYC website says that when “drag queens trained by children’s librarians read picture books, sing songs, and do craft activities with children,” this not only promotes literacy but also “teaches children to celebrate gender diversity and curbs bullying of LGBTQ children.”

When a live drag queen is unavailable, schools can show a video of a Drag Queen Story Hour at the Brooklyn Public Library.

This development has sparked alarm on conservative news sites. For example, *The Daily Caller* describes such a story hour at Maurice Sendak Community School, a public school in Brooklyn, and quotes videographer Sean Fitzgerald of the David Horowitz Freedom Center: “Think about how absurd this is. The taxpayer is funding adult-themed performers to come and read to our smallish children in order to indoctrinate them into a political ideology about gender while, at the same time, school districts across the country are removing any and all references to biological sex from science textbooks.”

The Daily Caller then provides a link to a website called stopk12indoctrination.org, where Fitzgerald invites his viewers to “report indoctrination in K-12 schools.”

Breitbart.com quotes the article from *The Daily Caller*, and adds: “Jane Robbins, senior fellow at the American Principles Project, based in Washington, DC, wrote in a statement sent to Breitbart News that “‘social emotional learning,’ in the hands of radical ideologues, can turn into child abuse.” Reported in: *The Daily Caller*, August 3; breitbart.com, August 7; dragqueenstoryhour.org/nyc, n.d. [accessed December 6].

Bookstores

RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA

Story time at Cellar Door bookstore in Riverside turned into a confrontation between a parent and the store owner, and it was all caught on camera. Cellar Door bookstore was hosting a story time event in which Halloween books were read by three drag queens.

“A lot of indie bookstores are doing drag queen story time,” said Linda Sherman-Nurick, an owner of the bookstore.

But it was clear that not everyone liked the idea. Sherman-Nurick said in the days leading up to the reading, she had been getting angry phone calls from people saying they shouldn’t host that event.

“Our response was ‘that’s fine, don’t come,’” she said.

During the event, Sherman-Nurick noticed a woman recording video and she explained to her that she couldn’t record kids without the parents’ permission.

But the woman, Los Angeles resident Genevieve Peters, refused to stop. On camera, she said the bookstore “has invited the public to watch this perversion with these



homosexuals. I'm sorry this is what's happening."

Some parents asked Peters to leave due to small children watching, but even after security guards stepped in, she refused. "That's what you get," she said. "This is our nation's children, you have no right to tell us about our children."

Peters said she wasn't recording the children, just the drag queens, and explained that she decided to attend the reading because she feels that the country is going down an immoral path.

"For the last 30 years, the homosexual agenda has been first and foremost wanting to desensitize our communities, our children, our families," she said.

Drag queen performer Jovani Morales said he's not surprised by the comments.

"I'm used to this negativity and hate," Morales said. "They're screaming hateful things and negative comments that kids shouldn't be hearing to begin with."

Eventually, a Riverside Police officer escorted Peters outside the bookstore, but she said if they bring the drag queens back, she will also be back.

Sherman-Nurick said the events will continue. She hopes that "the generation that comes up will not have these kinds of fears, hatred and ugliness." Reported in: *nbcbayarea.com*, November 1.

INTERNATIONAL Peel, Ontario, Canada

The board of a suburban Toronto school district is discouraging teachers from using the classic US novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee in their classrooms, judging the book to be harmful, violent, and oppressive to black students, with a trope of

a "white savior" who makes its black characters seem "less than human."

A memo from the Peel District School Board states, "The use of racist texts as entry points into discussions about racism is hardly for the benefit of black students who already experience racism. This should give us pause—who does the use of these texts center? Who does it serve? Why do we continue to teach them?"

The board denies that the memo constitutes either a ban or an argument to not teach the book.

"That's not its intent at all," said Adrian Graham, Peel's superintendent of curriculum and instruction support services. "We're definitely not about banning books. We don't have any English texts that are banned."

One Peel District School Board English teacher of long standing, however, called the memo "intimidating," and a "de facto book ban" that tells teachers who dare to assign the book that they will not be supported by the school board if anyone complains. Reported in *London (Ontario) Free Press*, October 18.

Egypt

Egypt's President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi has ratified an anti-cybercrime law that rights groups say paves the way for censoring online media.

The law, published August 18 in the country's official gazette, empowers authorities to order the blocking of websites that publish content considered a threat to national security. Viewers attempting to access blocked sites can also be sentenced to one year in prison or fined up to 100,000 Egyptian pounds (\$5,593) under the law.

In July, Egypt's parliament approved a bill placing personal social media accounts and websites with over 5,000 followers under the supervision of the top media authority, which can block

them if they are found to be disseminating false news.

Amnesty International criticized the governmental papers, in a July statement, saying they "give the state near-total control over print, online and broadcast media." Reported in: Associated Press, August 18.

FOR THE RECORD

EDITOR'S NOTE: Some actions that limit expression or access to information may be the result of editorial or business decisions, not covered by the First Amendment. News in this gray area that doesn't meet the strict definition of "censorship" is reported in this new section of the "Censorship Dateline" department.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Longtime *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* cartoonist Rob Rogers announced on June 14 that he was fired by the newspaper, after a number of his recent political cartoons had been killed.

Rogers said he went on vacation in early June after Keith Burris, the newspaper's editorial director, killed six of his cartoons in a row. Since Burris took over in March, Rogers has seen a total of 19 cartoons and ideas spiked, most involving criticism of President Trump.

Burris, who stoked controversy in January by writing an editorial defending Trump's criticism of immigrants from "s-hole countries," began overseeing the *Post-Gazette's* editorial pages after the paper's owner, Block Communications, combined them with the editorial pages of its other newspaper, *The Blade* of Toledo, Ohio. Burris was formerly the editorial page editor for *The Blade* and now splits his time between the two cities.

He acknowledged that he is "more conservative" than past editorial page editors and that even prior to Mr. Trump's election in 2016, the owners of the newspaper had been trying "to



right the ship” to reflect less liberal views.

Tracey DeAngelo, the *Post-Gazette*'s chief marketing officer, told CNN's Jake Tapper in a statement that the situation with Rogers' cartoons “has little to do with politics, ideology or Donald Trump. It has mostly to do with working together and the editing process.” Reported in: *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, June 14; *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 14.

Social Media

Gab, the controversial social network with a far-right following, has pulled its website offline after domain provider GoDaddy gave it 24 hours to move to another service. The move comes as other companies including PayPal, Medium, Stripe, and Joyent blocked Gab over the last weekend of October. It had emerged that Robert

Bowers, who allegedly shot and killed eleven people at a Pittsburgh synagogue on October 27, had a history of posting anti-Semitic messages on Gab.

GoDaddy confirmed its decision in a statement to *The Verge*: “We have informed Gab.com that they have 24 hours to move the domain to another provider, as they have violated our terms of service. In response to complaints received over the weekend, GoDaddy investigated and discovered numerous instances of content on the site that both promotes and encourages violence against people.”

When Gab became inaccessible, its website carried a message stating that the company is “under attack” and “working around the clock to get Gab.com back online” with a new provider. “We have been smeared by the mainstream media for defending free expression and individual liberty

for all people and for working with law enforcement to ensure that justice is served for the horrible atrocity committed in Pittsburgh,” according to the statement.

Gab's Twitter account said that the network would “likely be down for weeks” because of hosting provider Joyent's decision to pull support, though a later tweet said it will be “back soon.”

GoDaddy similarly cut off support for neo-Nazi news site the *Daily Stormer* following an article that was published about Heather Heyer, who was killed during the protests in Charlottesville last year. Meanwhile, major companies like Apple, Google, and Microsoft have taken various steps to remove Gab from their platforms. Reported in: *The Verge*, October 28.