



NEWS IS IT LEGAL?

LIBRARIES

Can political groups undermine the library board election process so only candidates willing to ban lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) materials get elected?

Candidates for the governing board of the Community Library Network in Idaho were asked about censorship and book banning as part of their qualifications for endorsement by the Kootenai County Republican Central Committee (KCRCC).

The library board governs seven libraries in Athol, Rathdrum, Hayden, Spirit Lake, Post Falls, Harrison, and Pinehurst, as well as a local bookmobile. The combined budget of the library network is roughly \$7 million.

According to their website, KCRCC is “the official vehicle for building and shaping the Idaho Republican Party at the county level.”

“They read to me from a book . . . that was apparently from one of the libraries that describes something about transgender and gay activity. They were obviously uncomfortable,” recalled Robert Fish, a board member who was running for re-election.

In response, he told them that, “The library is not in the business of censorship. We don’t censor books. We don’t censor any of our materials. The reason libraries exist is to provide information for anything to anybody

that has an interest in it. We don’t try to decide what people can read and talk about.”

Fish also referred them to the library’s materials selection policy and to the American Library Association’s “Freedom to Read Statement” and “Library Bill of Rights.”

Fish is a lifelong Republican and the current director of the Pachyderm Club of North Idaho. He was elected to the San Diego and Los Angeles County Republican Central Committees. He was also previously a trustee of the Community Library District in Coeur d’Alene.

KCRCC did not endorse his candidacy and according to Fish, this was because of how he answered their questions regarding censorship of LGBTQIA+ materials.

Cynthia Reyburn, another candidate, also said KCRCC questioned her about books pertaining to the LGBTQIA+ community. She said they asked her, “Are you in favor of these and if you were elected, would you support these materials in our libraries or our schools?”

In response, she stated libraries should have “materials that may make readers uncomfortable” and that libraries shouldn’t focus on one perspective.

Reyburn was so taken aback by the line of questioning from the KCRCC, she withdrew from candidacy after their interview. Reyburn is also a lifelong Republican.

Michele Veale has served on the library board for 22 years. She said of herself “I’m not a politician, I’m a library advocate.”

When asked about censorship, Veale said “No single person, or special interest group, gets to decide what everyone else has access to. That’s the opposite of what a library does.” KCRCC did not endorse her, either.

Neither Fish nor Veale was re-elected. Vanessa Robinson and Rachele Ottosen, the two candidates endorsed by KCRCC, were elected to the board in their stead.

Fish and Veale indicated they would continue to support the library however they could. “I can’t even tell you how much time I’ve spent working for the library, and I don’t intend to stop,” said Veale.

Incoming board member Robinson said she’d work to “market objectionable books away from the libraries’ younger visitors,” in tacit support of KCRCC’s alleged agenda of censoring titles with LGBTQIA+ content.

Ottosen said “I don’t think the public libraries need to be an extension of scriptural knowledge only, but they sure shouldn’t be forcing taxpayer funding of satanic agendas that lead to the destruction of our nation.”

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