

Testimony on HB 1143 March 3, 2021

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Rose Christensen.

I am here today in support of reintroducing a strong patriotic curriculum in our public schools, but, for the most part, I am in opposition to this bill

It is very easy to be enthusiastic about restoring a patriotic curriculum in our elementary schools, but if we take a good look at this bill, we find that not only does this "patriotic projects" bill not do what people think it's going to do, but it actually could result in doing just the opposite. Everything hinges on the definition of patriotism, and there is no definition of "patriotism" in this bill.

Those who testified in favor of this bill in the House obviously reacted emotionally to the use of that word in the bill, without carefully analyzing all the other verbiage. They fixed their attention on this word, and envisioned a return to the time when The school days started with the raising of the flag, the pledge of allegiance, and prayer.

The fact is that none of that is in this bill. The fact is that if you removed the word "patriotism" entirely from this bill, you would find it actually introduces and anchors an often controversial METHOD of teaching in our schools, a method known by various names including "Outcome based education", which, while it continues to capitalize on references to "patriotism" may, in fact, not result in anything even remotely suggestive of the vision these witnesses evoked in their testimony.

The lack of a definition of "patriotism" is the fatal flaw in this proposal. While we old-timers have a very clear understanding of that word, it has been subjected to some pretty rough treatment in recent times. The very term "patriotism" has come under attack from those who espouse a globalist world view and promote a curriculum geared to a socialist, one world perspective at the expense of a basic national interest. Putting one's own nation first is frequently ridiculed as some kind of barbarian jingoism. I fear that unless this Committee amends this bill to

include a solid, traditional definition of patriotism, you will not like what comes of it!

I tried to find an ideal definition of patriotism, and believe me, they vary dramatically. In a review of the new book "Reclaiming Patriotism in an Age of Extremes", author Steven Smith gives us an inkling of what may lie ahead for the modern meaning of patriotism. He starts by reminding us of the famous line from Samuel Johnson that "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel." With that unpleasant introduction, he moves on to tell us that patriotism "has come to seem morally questionable." At best it is an "unenlightened preference for one's own at the expense of a more enlightened cosmopolitan point of view." At worst he continued, "patriotism is a primitive sentiment, one tied to nationalism, chauvinism, an aggressive, militaristic mindset, and a desire to dominate other people or at least proclaim the superiority of one's own ways over all others." Wow! Would we want someone of this mind-set teaching "patriotism" In our schools ?

I prefer Kristi Noem's vision of "patriotism". Last weekend at CPAC, she wowed the crowds with this. "Let's always remember: America is good. Freedom is better than tyranny. We are unique. We are exceptional. And no American should ever, ever apologize for that."

So, This Committee MUST agree on a definition of patriotism before you act on this bill.

Having said all that, I want to point out that this bill is NOT about the promotion of a sense of patriotic love for our country. It does not introduce and reemphasize the wonderful things about our country. It might touch on some aspects of what we conceive of as "patriotism", but its main thrust is to promote ACTIVISM. Greta Thunberg type of student ACTIVISM!

Section 1, subsection 1. Defines a "patriotism project" as a "student-led ACTION on a **community issue of the student's choice which is intended to influence the issue positively**, and which requires research and **documentation regarding the process AND OUTCOME of the ACTION taken!**

Clearly, the emphasis here is on the METHOD that will be used to train students to become advocates and community activists. Notice that the research these students will be doing is NOT on history, or civics, or on anything else even remotely connected to instilling a love of country which is what we usually think of when we discuss "patriotism". . The **research and documentation** the student is supposed to engage in **is related to THE PROCESS OF ACTIVATING** (OR SHOULD WE SAY "AGITATING") for a specific OUTCOME on some community issue which the student has decided to "influence positively".

Little johnny may have been influenced to have a negative view of vehicles that run on fossil fuel. He may choose to take on a project on the "community issue" of the construction of a new gas plaza at the edge of town. He may take action to convince some of his classmates to paint their bicycles red, white and blue, and **to protest the construction by blocking the access to the building** site. He will have met all the requirements for having performed a "patriotic project", but since patriotic was never defined in this bill, the only OUTCOME is that the schools and taxpayers have subsidized the development and training of another rabble - rousing community activist.

Section 1b does define "project-based", and admits that it is the teaching METHOD which is the goal. No more deceptive veil of renewing the student's "patriotism". The talk of "knowledge and skills" the student is supposed to acquire through a "student-influenced inquiry process" could relate to anything in the world! Do YOU understand what this is talking about?

The reference to "student-based inquiry process" is an interesting concept. Of course we want students to be inquisitive...to have inquiring minds...but left to themselves they will not advance much beyond the highest level of knowledge already acquired by their group. **The whole purpose of hiring mature, educated teachers is to raise the level of knowledge.** If those who are not yet educated are designated to LEAD others who are not yet educated, will the level of education rise? Again, there is absolutely no reference here to anything even remotely connected to "patriotism."

Subsection 2 simply specifies the beginning date for introduction of a “patriotic project” and provides that it could be integrated with other course curricula. There is no objection to this provision, except that I would substitute the word “unit” for the word “project” which smacks strongly of the “activist” agenda

Starting with Subsection 4, this Bill takes a turn for the worse. It reveals itself as progressively building a new, bigger and potentially more costly and intrusive role for the Department of Public Instruction. Subsection 4 mandates the Superintendent’s guidance regarding “quality standards” for the so-called “patriotism projects”... and how they are to be implemented. One wonders how anyone could provide “quality standards” for “patriotism projects” when there has been no definition of “patriotism”, other than to suggest it is somehow aligned with training community activists and organizers!.

In Section 5, the Superintendent“ may seek assistance from third parties to implement professional development for staff related to project-based patriotism education. “ If you can fight your way through the education jargon, you realize this empowers the SUPT to hire outside “assistance” to intrude on the already busy schedule of schools, teachers, administrators and possibly even school boards to train them in the use of this experimental METHOD. If the schools simply supplemented, or substituted a k-6 patriotism course of study for less important subject matter, ...one that could be integrated with other subjects such as reading or history, it would be a win-win for the local schools , the kids, the parent and the taxpayers.

Section 6 originally specified that only veterans’ groups could donate money to school districts for the furtherance of the “patriotic project curriculum” but it was amended to include unidentified “civic groups” . The Veterans Groups that we are familiar with have done a great work with our Young people outside of school, and have proven they are a good and patriotic influence in our communities. “Civic groups”, however, come and go. They are unidentified in this bill. These unidentified entities have no track record, and I think they should be amended back out of this bill. Since we still don’t know what the intended OUTCOME of

this undefined “patriotism project” is, let’s not open the door to contributions from unknown entities to promote it!

Sections 7 introduces another worrisome feature. Why on earth does the completion of each child’s “patriotism project” have to be communicated to the Supt “through the shared student information system”? What IS the “shared student information system”? Who else is this student information shared WITH? And why? Is this part of a national data base ? AT what point is little Charlie’s personal information part of the public record? What if little Charlie has done a “patriotic project” on his Second Amendment right to keep and Bear Arms? How far and wide will this information spread ? What about Charlie’s right to privacy?

Recently in the news there was a major flap about unrestricted access to photos of little gymnasts . Are pictures of those pretty little faces and graceful bodies more worthy of protection from random gawkers, than the political profiles of your little patriots? I object to this provision in this bill.

Section 8 – Is much ado about something that doesn’t need to be provided for by law. The Governor is free to make a proclamation designating Patriot’s Day at the Capitol, where he could provide an opportunity for schools and individual students to showcase their talents, compete in speech contests, teen quiz bowls, etc. It could feature old-fashioned sing-alongs of old-fashioned campfire songs, talent contest, parades, floats, marching bands, food vendors etc. He would not need advice from the Superintendent of Public Instruction to initiate such a celebration of “patriotism”.

In short, this bill sounds good until you realize it really has nothing to do with rebuilding patriotic sentiment in America. It is about establishing a controversial experimental educational method to train community activists . It is about expanding the role of the Department of Public Instruction which has already FAILED to do its constitutional duty to “impress upon the mind” of our students “the vital importance of truthfulness, temperance, purity, public spirit, and respect for honest labor of every kind.” (Article VIII, Section 3.) It is about empowering the DPI to interfere with the regular operation of our schools by imposing more unnecessary, time-consuming responsibilities on them.

Local school Boards are supposed to be in charge of running local schools. I suggest we let them design or choose a curriculum to implement their own course in patriotism. I suggest that this bill be gutted, and reduced to two sections only: Section one: Define patriotism. Section two: Mandate that k-6 coursework be designed to familiarize elementary students with basic flag etiquette, the pledge of allegiance, the national anthem, the Declaration of Independence and why we celebrate the Fourth of July, the US Constitution, and the basic history and geography of the of the United States.

Article VIII, Section 1 states: "A high degree of intelligence, patriotism, integrity and morality on the part of every voter in a government by the people being necessary in order to insure the continuance of that government and the prosperity and happiness of the people, the legislative assembly shall make provision for the establishment and maintenance of a system of public schools.

That's why our public schools exist. You are the legislative assembly. You have the authority to eliminate all these middlemen and women, all this administrative fuss and bother, all the costly professional development staff, and to pass a simple law restoring the teaching of patriotism in our schools. Find the best definition of patriotism that you can find. Highlight it in Section one. Mandate it for all elementary schools, and empower the School Boards in those districts to prepare and implement such a curriculum in Section 2. And be done with it.

Thank you.