

117TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. RES. 1392

Recognizing “Banned Books Week” and the sweeping attacks on books in the United States today, acknowledging the central role books play in promoting democratic and civil discourse, and urging recognition of the illegitimate tactics being used to ban books in K–12 classrooms, universities, prisons, and libraries.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SEPTEMBER 22, 2022

Mr. RASKIN (for himself, Ms. BONAMICI, Mr. BOWMAN, Ms. ESCOBAR, Mr. GRIJALVA, Mr. HUFFMAN, Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia, Ms. NORTON, Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ, Ms. TLAIB, Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, and Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Education and Labor, and in addition to the Committee on the Judiciary, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

RESOLUTION

Recognizing “Banned Books Week” and the sweeping attacks on books in the United States today, acknowledging the central role books play in promoting democratic and civil discourse, and urging recognition of the illegitimate tactics being used to ban books in K–12 classrooms, universities, prisons, and libraries.

Whereas the First Amendment of the Constitution protects freedom of speech and the freedom to read and write;

Whereas Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers”;

Whereas PEN America has identified more than 1,600 unique books by 1,261 different authors, 290 illustrators, and 18 translators that have been banned in the United States during the 2021–2022 school year;

Whereas an increasing number of book bans have departed from best practice guidelines outlined by the National Coalition Against Censorship, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the American Library Association;

Whereas the sharing of all ideas and the freedom to read are essential for a strong democracy;

Whereas books do not require readers to agree with topics or themes but instead allow readers to explore and engage with differing perspectives to form and inform their own views;

Whereas suppressing the freedom to read and denying access to literature, history, and knowledge are inherently illiberal and antidemocratic tactics used by authoritarian regimes against their people;

Whereas book bans often seek to impose restrictions on all students and families based on the political, ideological, or cultural preferences of the individuals calling for book bans;

Whereas book bans have multifaceted, harmful consequences on—

(1) students who have a right to access a diverse range of stories and perspectives;

(2) students, from historically marginalized backgrounds, whose communities are often underrepresented in literature;

(3) educators and librarians who are operating in some states in an increasingly punitive and surveillance-oriented environment with a chilling effect on teaching and learning;

(4) the authors whose works are being targeted; and

(5) parents who want to raise students in schools that remain open to curiosity, discovery, and the freedom to read;

Whereas classic and award-winning literature and books that have been part of school curricula for decades have been challenged, removed from libraries pending review, or outright banned from schools, including “Brave New World” by Aldous Huxley, “The Handmaid’s Tale” by Margaret Atwood, “Anne Frank’s Diary: The Graphic Adaptation”, “Their Eyes Were Watching God” by Zora Neale Hurston, and “To Kill a Mockingbird” by Harper Lee;

Whereas books, particularly those written by and about outsiders, newcomers, and people from marginalized backgrounds, are facing heightened risk of being banned;

Whereas 674 books referring to LGBTQ+ themes or with LGBTQ+ characters have been banned in the United States this year, including children’s books such as “Families, Families, Families!” and “All Are Welcome”, which recognize the equal humanity and dignity of all persons, despite our differences;

Whereas 659 books, both fiction and nonfiction, with protagonists of color or prominent secondary characters of color have been banned in the United States this year, including “Ruby Bridges Goes to School: My True Story”, “Martin Luther King, Jr. and the March on Washington”, “Thank You, Jackie Robinson”, “Malala: A Hero For All”, “Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story”, “Hair Love”, “Good Trouble: Lessons from the Civil Rights Playbook”, and “We Are All Born Free: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Pictures”;

Whereas the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund has reported a dramatic surge in challenges at libraries and schools to the inclusion of graphic novels such as “New Kid”, “Drama”, “American Born Chinese”, and “Maus” that depict the vital diversity of American civic life, and the painful historical realities of the human experience, including in the Holocaust;

Whereas books addressing death, grief, mental illness, and suicide are targeted alongside nonfiction books that discuss feelings and emotions written for teenage and young adult audiences that confront these topics frequently;

Whereas soft censorship, the quiet removal or hiding of books, presents a subtle challenge that may be obscuring the magnitude of the problem;

Whereas educators throughout the country have been targeted for simply teaching students the truth about United States history including, for example, the extreme action by the Oklahoma secretary of education in seeking to revoke the teaching certificate of an educator who merely provided students a link to Brooklyn Public Library’s Books Unbanned project, which provides young

people across the country access to books that may be banned in their schools;

Whereas the Committee on Oversight and Reform’s Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties held hearings on April 7, 2022, “Free Speech Under Attack: Book Bans and Academic Censorship”, and on May 19, 2022, “Free Speech Under Attack (Part II): Curriculum Sabotage and Classroom Censorship”, at which students, parents, teachers, librarians, and school administrators testified to the chilling and fear-inducing effects that book bans have on education and the school environment;

Whereas more than 150 bills have been introduced in States across the country that would restrict books and curricula on race and gender in schools since January 2021;

Whereas 19 curriculum gag orders have been enacted in 15 States across the country;

Whereas during the 2021–2022 school year, nearly 140 school districts in 32 States issued more than 2,500 book bans, including repeated titles, affecting more than 5,000 individual schools enrolling nearly 4,000,000 students, limiting students’ access to these books for limited or indefinite periods of time, including—

(1) in Florida, where at least 566 books in total have been banned in 21 school districts;

(2) in Georgia, where at least 23 books in total have been banned in 2 school districts;

(3) in Indiana, where at least 18 books in total have been banned in 3 school districts;

(4) in Kansas, where at least 30 books in total have been banned in 2 school districts;

(5) in Michigan, where at least 41 books in total have been banned in 4 school districts;

(6) in Missouri, where at least 27 books in total have been banned in 8 school districts;

(7) in New York, where at least 123 books in total have been banned in 34 school districts;

(8) in Oklahoma, where at least 43 books in total have been banned in 3 school districts;

(9) in Pennsylvania, where at least 457 books in total have been banned in 11 school districts;

(10) in Tennessee, where at least 349 books in total have been banned in 6 school districts;

(11) in Texas, where at least 801 books in total have been banned in 22 school districts;

(12) in Utah, where at least 1,211 books in total have been banned in 3 school districts; and

(13) in Virginia, where at least 169 books in total have been banned in 79 school districts;

Whereas an overwhelming majority of American voters oppose book bans;

Whereas an overwhelming majority of American voters support educators teaching about the Civil Rights Movement, the history and experiences of Native Americans, enslaved Africans, immigrants facing discrimination, and the ongoing effects of racism;

Whereas, in 1969, the Supreme Court held in *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District* that students do not “shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate”; and

Whereas, in 1982, the Supreme Court ruled in *Board of Education v. Pico* that schools may not remove books based on “narrowly partisan or political grounds”, as this kind of censorship will result in “official suppression of ideas”: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—

2 (1) expresses concern about the spreading prob-
3 lem of book banning and proliferating threats to
4 freedom of expression in the United States;

5 (2) reaffirms the commitment of the United
6 States to supporting writers' freedom of expression,
7 and the freedom of all Americans to read books
8 without government censorship;

9 (3) calls on local governments and educational
10 institutions to follow outlined best practice guide-
11 lines when approaching challenges to books; and

12 (4) calls on local governments and educational
13 institutions to protect the rights of students to learn
14 and the ability of educators and librarians to teach
15 students including by way of providing students with
16 the opportunity to read a wide array of books re-
17 flecting a multitude of viewpoints and perspectives.

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