

Opinion

The Wilson Times

WILSON'S 24/7 NEWS SOURCE IN PRINT AND ONLINE

MORE THAN A NEWSPAPER — A COMMUNITY INSTITUTION SINCE 1896

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THOUGHT FOR TODAY

Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction. (2 Timothy 4:2)

PRAYER: Dear Father, help us to move beyond our reluctance and fear and embrace opportunities to share the good news in any place. Amen.

IN OUR OPINION

Empower parents without waffling on freedom to read

A stakeholder group fears that young adult books dealing with sexuality and gender could confuse or corrupt Wilson County schoolchildren, and it's asking the Board of Education to give parents more oversight when it comes to what their kids check out from school libraries.

In an Aug. 4 email to school board members and the superintendent, Wilson, N.C., Partners in Education raises the alarm.

"We have identified several books available in Wilson County middle and high school libraries that contain graphic descriptions of sexual acts and other controversial subject matter," states the email, which is signed by Partners in Education leadership team members Sarah Ridder, Sue Glisson, Jane Cookson, Chuck Baio, Vonda Goff and Brenda Enders.

The message lists three books available at Elm City and Forest Hills middle schools and includes a link to excerpts on a website called The Pavement Education Project. That site doesn't identify its creator, but it manages to misconstrue the relevant law so thoroughly that we'll wager he or she isn't a member of the bar.

Sixteen books found in Wilson County school libraries are erroneously listed as obscene. The PEP helpfully shares the text of North Carolina's obscenity law, General Statute 14-190.1, but it unhelpfully highlights a portion that defines "sexual conduct" rather than the section directly above it, which contains a four-prong test for obscene material so exacting that no book on school shelves is likely to ever come close.

Obscenity is a narrow category of speech that falls outside the bounds of First Amendment protection. In *Miller v. California*, decided in 1973, the Supreme Court established three standards that must be met before content can be judged obscene — and thus unlawful.

"In *Miller*, the Court reasoned that individuals could not be convicted of obscenity charges unless the materials depict 'patently offensive hard core sexual conduct.' Under that reasoning, many sexually explicit materials — pornographic magazines, books and movies — are not legally obscene," law professor and scholar David L. Hudson Jr. explains in the First Amendment Encyclopedia, a project of the Free Speech Center at Middle Tennessee State University.

Last amended in 1998, North Carolina's obscenity law incorporates the *Miller* test and adds a fourth requirement for good measure. There's no constitutional shortcut here.

Profanity, obscenity and vulgarity are pretty much synonymous in a colloquial sense, but when it comes to whether and how government agencies like a public school system can regulate content, precise legal definitions matter. Some smart, levelheaded folks count themselves among Partners in Education's members, and parroting the Pavement Education Project's misuse of the word "obscene" needlessly muddies the waters and undermines the local organization's credibility.

"We can provide more titles (or) excerpts from other books, but our goal is not to ban books," the Partners in Education email states. "Solutions may be found, such as a rating system or having parental approval for certain titles."

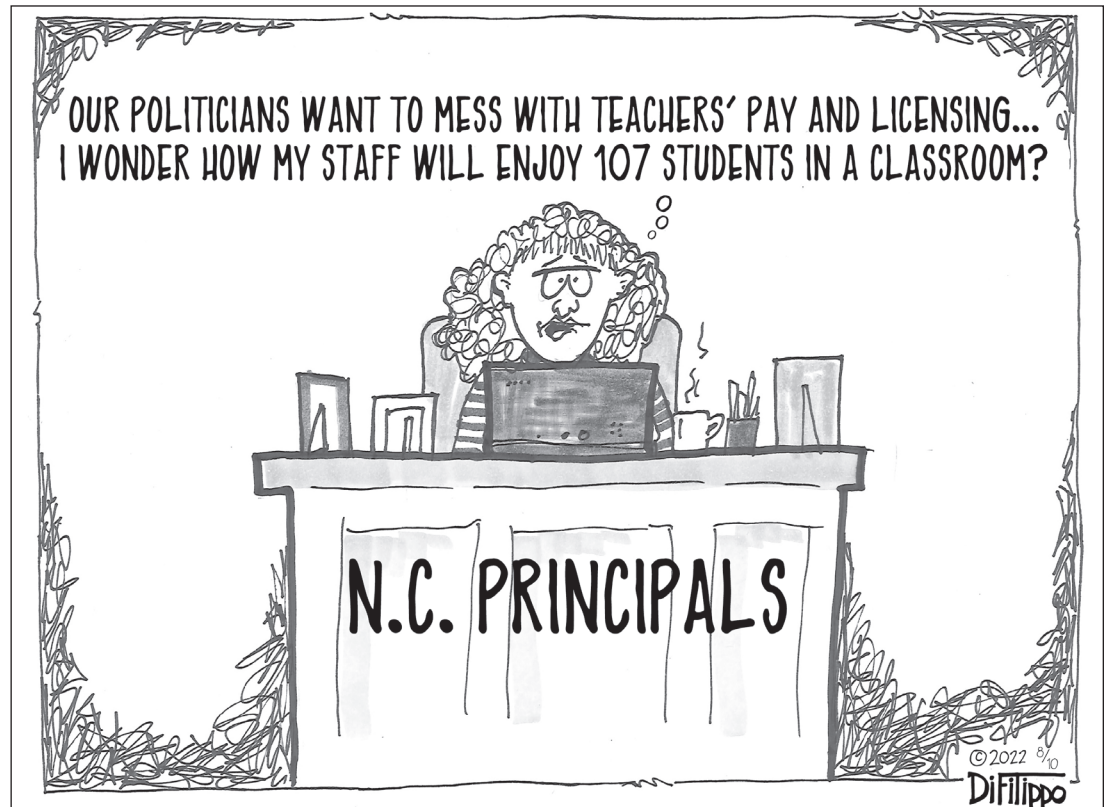
We applaud the group for rejecting book bans, an affront to American liberty that has reared its ugly head in too many other communities. A rating system is likely to cause more problems than it solves, however, because it requires too many subjective judgment calls. If parents already don't see eye to eye with the school officials who order and stock the books they dislike, why would they suddenly be on the same page when it comes to how they're categorized?

Last fall, the American Association of School Librarians Board of Directors signed on to an American Library Association statement on book censorship that all involved ought to take the time to read. It's a tour de force.

Book bans are and must always remain a nonstarter. That prospect off the table, some Partners in Education requests seem like reasonable efforts to strike a balance between schools' obligation to serve students from every kind of household and parents' right to determine which books, magazines, movies and games are appropriate for their children.

"Informed parents make better educational advocates," the Partners in Education wrote. We agree.

If the organization's members want more details about the book selection process and a way to monitor or approve the library materials their kids check out, Wilson County Schools ought to oblige them. But your right to make decisions for your family cannot deprive other parents of the prerogative to do the same for theirs.



LETTERS

Tony Verdini turned life's losses to victory

One of the first things I discovered about Tony Verdini was that there was more to him than met the eye. He had a certain confidence that comes not from within, but without.

Just picture this. The first day I met him, we were sitting in my office — me and this guy with a very pronounced Yankee accent talking about nothing in particular, and out of nowhere, he tells me he had wrestled in college. To top that off, it was at Campbell University, not necessarily your first choice for college athletics.

Now, I've been around sports all my life. I pitched baseball my freshman year at ECU, my brother played football for Carolina and my other brother wrestled at State. Heck, even my dad played football for Duke back in 1950. I think I know athletes. So when Tony, all 120 pounds of him, told me he wrestled on a scholarship at Campbell, I just had to ask, "how'd that happen? I mean, who'd you wrestle?"

Now, it's true that there are lightweight wrestling divisions, so his assertion wasn't that outrageous. But what followed was, because his very next words were, "but I lost every match except one!" Yep, you read that right, every match but one. So, who brags about that? That's kind of like saying you fished the Big Rock every year and only boated mullets. But hang on, it gets better.

The next thing he told me was that's the way it was meant to be. It never mattered that he lost, because he was really only there to complete the team. He was actually recruited to the team so it would have enough wrestlers to fill every weight class. Without Tony, no one else could have wrestled — in fact, they wouldn't even have had a team.

The way Tony explained it that day: "The coach told me, 'You're on the team, but you're probably gonna lose.'"

So he spent the next four years of his life doing just that, all the while making lifelong friends, completing his degree and never once doubting his coach's promise that winning is more than just coming out on top and that sometimes the greatest victories in life actually come through losing.

I like to think God was lovingly preparing Tony during his Campbell days for the greatest match of his life.

When Tony first got the awful news of his cancer, just like anyone else, he was crushed at first. His doctors and those he trusted were telling him that he was gonna lose. But the amazing thing is that I don't think Tony heard it quite that way. I think what he really heard deep down inside his heart of hearts — in his soul — was, "but you're still on the team, now get back

out there and show me what you've got!"

Every day that I've known him since those first dark ones have proved he's nothing but a winner. And one of the truly special things about winning is that people want to be around you — they want to win too.

Through a path that only God could design, Tony was led to victory not just for himself, but for every one of us who has been blessed enough to have known him and walked with him. Through the miracle that only our savior can provide, all the losses that made him who he was produced the victory he turned out to be.

William Batchelor, D.D.S.
WILSON

Value an education: Something to think about

Right now, many parents want babysitters. Children have to be taught respect and responsibility from home; then their part of learning will not be strenuous.

They care more about their phones — some texting their parents — and will curse you out or would rather be suspended, which causes them to miss the classroom instruction. So, where is the priority? Parents complain that their children need to be in the classroom. When they are there, however, they cause issues. They don't do the work, do not have paper or pencil or fall asleep in class because they stayed up late playing video games, texting and watching movies.

There were so many excuses from parents. Everything points back to them and their children. How many times have I heard, "I have to work"? Guess what? So do teachers!

I experienced covering other teachers' classes without lesson plans. Often, they are quitting at the end of the month or don't complete a school year. Sometimes at the last minute, I am expected to teach subjects I am not familiar with. Therefore, I have worked from 7 a.m. until 4 p.m. without a break.

The teachers who really care and are there nearly every day are used and abused. The good teachers who have teaching in their hearts don't want to do it anymore because of the lack of support from parents and being overworked. Where does that leave the future of society? Adults who can't read, write, comprehend, count money or communicate professionally. Children are being passed to the next grade level unprepared!

There are many websites on the internet to improve the skills needed in every subject area, like reading, math, science and history. All it takes is for students to Google it like

they do for anything else they want to know. If you make sure they have phones, they need to use them for something that will benefit their minds and their confidence, like schoolwork.

Stop blaming years of COVID-19. We learned from those parents and children who did what was necessary: attended Zoom classes, completed hard copies of work that parents picked up and returned on time, obeyed the rules of social distancing and wore a mask to protect themselves and others. Procedures changed, yet, learning continued.

Parents: the success of your child or children begins with you. No more excuses!

Cary Remington
WILSON

Biden apologists' unique vocabulary

If a recession is not a recession, a struggling economy is a "success" and the southern border is "secure," may we call Jan. 6 a "vigorous self-guided tour of the Capitol"?

Or was seating Blacks in the back of a bus merely a courteous, considerate way of reserving seating on public transportation? And Bill Clinton was selfless in holding male anatomy classes in the Oval Office for interns?

Now, when do I get my own show on MSNBC or a high-paid position in the Biden administration?

Mark Levin
ROCKY MOUNT

Uplift

Everybody needs help
Can't no one person do it by themselves.

It's time to mature and accept the breaks
Before we end up self-destructing.

Instead of robbing each other,
Killing each other and hurting one another,
I can do you one better: Let's just come together.

They say when it rains, it pours, but if we were together,
I could be your umbrella and help you weather the weather.

Now, don't that sound clever?

But that's only part of my plan to lend a hand,
Not looking for it to be lent back.

To motivate and uplift the culture and human race
That doesn't understand that we are the ones

Who hold ourselves back, and that's a fact
Nowhere near an opinion, having each other's

Back is the only way that we're winning.

Artavious Boddie
COLEMAN, FLA.
The writer, a former Wilson resident, is an inmate at Federal Correctional Complex Coleman.

Tell us what's on your mind

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