

MIAMI TODAY

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Mind-chilling bid to systematize public schools censorship

A bill the Florida House passed last week would create a far-reaching censorship system to orient all public school books and materials to views of state leaders while drowning every school in a vast sea of hearings and red tape that could create lengthy legal challenges.



Michael Lewis

School officials in all 67 counties would have to align books to mandates of the state board of education, policing from the top down. Meanwhile, the public must be told of every single book in classrooms and libraries. Schools would have to hold a hearing for every book selected and again using an outside qualified hearing officer for complaints by anyone about any book, policing from the bottom up.

Every school would have to list for the state every book removed after complaints. Every school selection of books – even donations – would be compared with that statewide complaint list so a book banned in any community would face banning everywhere.

And, so that nothing slipped through the cracks, every person in every public school who might so much as accept a donated book would have to first be trained in what is and is not acceptable to the state. A local school board hearing would review each new book being accepted, with public comments.

The governor and education commissioner have already made clear that critical race theory is among ideas that may not enter Florida classrooms. Abetted by this legislation, they would have free rein to ban any other thoughts and writings.

While this legislation is sold as regulation of education, it is clearly regulation of ideas. The vote was on party lines – 78 Republicans yes, 40 Democrats no. If this became law, it would leave few loopholes to admit ideas of which Big Brother in Tallahassee did not approve.

Attacks on books are myriad, though seldom so systematic. Such attacks come particularly from the less educated and most manipulative among us. Educators have spent years fending off such attacks. Now the state is about to give attackers new weaponry.

The American Library Association tracks attacks on classic literary works used in classrooms. On the Radcliffe Publishing Course list of the top 100 novels of the 20th century, 46 had faced one or multiple banning attempts, and nine were attacked in Florida. State legislation that

would force schools to publish online lists of books they select and to hold a public hearing on each would make it far easier for a single critic to start the ball rolling, leading to a hearing on a complaint and possible ban.

Books in the Top 100 challenged in Florida include *The Catcher in the Rye* by JD Salinger, which was ousted or challenged in three Florida school systems. Under the legislation in process, that book would be listed for every school to consider banning.

Other Top 100 books would also have been targeted for statewide bans, including *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, *Beloved* by Toni Morrison (challenged in Sarasota County by someone who hadn't seen the book but had read about it on the internet, which also happened in other cases), *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov, *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, and *Animal Farm* by George Orwell, banned in Bay County schools, which also banned 64 other books, then had to reinstate them all.

Also challenged in Florida was George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in which totalitarian leader Big Brother policed what people read and thought in overwhelming brainwashing. That book should be required reading while looking at how Florida's government is trying to control what our school children should hear, see or be aware of.

Of books in the Top 100 that were published in the first third of the last century, many were not only questioned in Florida but burned in Nazi Germany as Hitler rose to power. Others were banned in Russia. Also very good at book banning were Castro's Cuba and Communist China.

That's the company Florida leadership is flirting with. This bill would not only allow regular looks at removing books but require those reviews, based in part on state standards.

While the House passed this bill, the Senate has not. A Senate vote would allow the governor to sign this and further tighten control over what can be read or said in Florida schools. This should frighten thoughtful Floridians.

If you don't worry about Gov. Ron DeSantis, worry about what a future governor might do with these powers to control young brains. Remember, any book can be challenged; the Bible has been.

If you don't worry about attacks on generally accepted literature, what about attacks on historical materials or social studies?

Centralized censorship of education can lead to graduating automatons rather than thinking United States citizens who can carry our nation forward. Make sure your state senator is aware of your thoughts before the next vote to clamp down on students' brains.

Why should City of Miami restore Miami Marine Stadium?

Why restore Miami Marine Stadium? Principally because there is no other building like it in the entire world. It is the epitome of iconic.

When constructed in 1963, the stadium's roof was the largest cantilevered, poured-concrete slab anywhere on Earth.

Although originally intended as a venue to watch boat races in the man-made basin (6,000 feet by 1,200 feet, the length of the National Mall in Washington, DC), the 6,500-seat stadium hosted a wide variety of events – musical, religious, political, sporting and theatrical – until it closed after Hurricane Andrew in 1992.

The property on which the stadium sits was gifted to the City of Miami by Miami-Dade County, and the deed of conveyance contains a reverter clause: In the event the land is not used for a Marine Stadium, the title to the property shall return to the county. The stadium, its envelope of land and the basin became locally designated by the City of Miami as historic in 2009, and the stadium was named to the National Register of Historic Places in 2018.

Robust local, national and even international support is overwhelming for renovating and reactivating the stadium. In 2016, the Miami City Commission authorized up to \$45 million in revenue-bond financing for improvements at the site. That authorization for the bond sale has expired. It should be re-authorized by city commissioners. Architectural plans have been completed and thoroughly reviewed by the city, and the process to select a contractor is at hand. Here are some reasons why the city should pro-



Donald Worth

The Writer

Donald Worth has been a long-time proponent of restoration of Miami Marine Stadium.

ceed at once:

■The stadium is financially feasible as an event venue. Independent analysis by respected facility operators concluded that the stadium will earn a profit. And vendors who manage facilities worldwide responded with enthusiasm to the city's 2019 solicitation for a stadium operator: They, too, concluded that a renovated stadium will be a money-maker even with only a modest number of events. (That procurement was cancelled for technical reasons, but the city intends to issue a new request for proposals.)

■Tourism and business leaders in Miami strongly believe the stadium provides Miami with a singularly unique attraction for tourists, and that its renovation would turbo-charge Miami's reputation as a cutting-edge place for special events. In 2014, Tourism Cares, the not-for-profit arm of the national tourism industry, sponsored a highly successful volunteer day at the stadium and elsewhere on Virginia Key with attendance from across the US.

■The stadium would attract enormous, positive international media coverage for Miami. Even while shuttered, it has been positively featured in press outlets such as *Sports Illustrated*, *PBS Nightly News* and several major stories syndicated by the Associated Press. Beginning this summer, the stadium will be featured in a 12-minute segment on the Discovery Channel in Great Britain, parts of Europe and in America; filming was completed this past December.

■The stadium will give Miami residents incredible access to the waterfront. With the exception of our beaches, most of the city's waterfront hosts expensive homes and condos, 5-star hotels and yacht clubs. All manner of community events will occur at the stadium, surrounded eventually by a fabulous park and with stunning views of the basin and downtown Miami. At Marine Stadium, everyone will be a VIP. And it truly is a multi-purpose venue perfectly suited for many different uses – concerts, water sports, corporate meetings and athletic events, to name just a few.

■Unlike other major projects in Greater Miami, the stadium has broad-based support and no real organized opposition: There are no neighbors to bother. The Village of Key Biscayne recognizes that moderate-sized events at the stadium will not impact their residents' access and that, in fact, events there will be an amenity to the village.

■The Stadium is "the most Cuban building in Miami." This theme was recently

celebrated in a global Zoom seminar this past September, entitled "From Havana to Miami: The Architectural and Cultural Significance of Miami Marine Stadium." The seminar featured prominent speakers from the World Monuments Fund, the historic preservation community, and Hilario Candela, who at age 27 was the stadium's original architect.

■The stadium has already attracted significant corporate interest. Heineken produced several promotions and a successful crowd-funding campaign for the stadium; its promotional video generated 39 million views. Audemars Piguet, Adidas and Louis Vuitton are among other brands that have sponsored significant events at the stadium in recent years.

■Finally, the stadium is an important part of the city's Virginia Key Master Plan. That plan was extensively vetted by the public and approved unanimously by the city commission in 2010.

Remember: There is no other building like it in the entire world!

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Film incentives too low and restrictions too great

Come on! This is saddled with too many requirements for such a small amount of money. We are in the year 2022, not the year 1962! Features and TV shows are breaking the \$100 million mark. None of these shows are at the \$1 million mark. Please move the decimal over on this incentive, and pull some of the restrictions off.

Shawn Becker

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