

Friday, October 31. 2008

## News Nuggets

Campaign Buttons?: Not on our Campus!

The chancellor of the New York City School System promulgated a memo reminding system staff that political paraphernalia could not be worn at school. He sent this memo in response to the truckloads of campaign buttons that the teachers' union sent to the schools to promote their favorite candidate.

Of course, this action reached the national news, and the chancellor took flack from both political camps&hellip;as well as free speech advocates, anarchists, religious rights groups and atheists.

The memo pointed out that the NYC Schools have a long-standing policy that prohibits the display of campaign artifacts. However, there had been lax enforcement of these rules until the teachers' union pushed the issues to the limit. Where do Self-Expression Prohibitions End? Should children discuss politics and national issues in school?

Of course, since the candidates often skirt these concerns in favor of spin that is designed to avoid angering anyone.

But, should teachers say what candidate they favor, even with non-verbal button?

And, if it is non-verbal, how can it be free speech?

And what are the boundaries? For example, students know which teachers drive what cars. Can a teacher place a candidates bumper sticker on his or her car, and park the car in the school parking lot?

Or, does the teacher have to park said car outside the campus fence?

And, if the car must be parked outside the campus fence, how far away from school property? What other Speech is Protected? What other speech is "protected speech?"

What about religious speech?

For example, a cross is worn not far from where a campaign button might located. Is the cross OK, but the button outlawed.

And, if the cross is OK, what about a crucifix?

Schools have dress codes about Tee-shirts that use harsh, profane or other "disruptive" language.

Images of devils, demons are prohibited, and students were even banned from wearing Tee-shirts with Darth Maul, the Sith apprentice in George Lucas' movie, The Phantom Menace. The reason, he had a red and black face and small horns.

But the crucifix, depicts torture. Why should that be allowed?

And isn't a crucifixion multiple levels of magnitude worse than water boarding?

And, what if someone expresses anti-abortion sentiments. Could they make the case that abortion kills just as dead as crucifixion? But, couldn't another person make the case that the unborn fetus is a lesser person than a person that was born, and therefore it is OK to kill them> Doesn't breathing oxygen from the air instead of from a liquid or a tube confer civil rights that are absent from earlier, metamorphic stages? Where do the Rules Stop? Wicca is an established religion, probably founded before Judaism, Christianity and Islam. And Satanic Churches obtain tax deductions because they represent a legitimate religion.

However, some schools may still prohibit Muslim girls from wearing head scarves. How is a head scarf disruptive to the campus learning environment? Extremists to the Rescue Rational people, good natured and tolerant, are content to allow others to express their views and opinions. These folks just don't want other people to bother them. A Satanist is OK, as long as they don't sacrifice your pet black cat on Halloween.

But extremists hold a stricter agenda. They want to control other peoples' behavior, and they wish that they could control other people's thinking. They want other people to think in a manner similar to the way that they think.

So, while most people are content to let others alone, extremists keep churning until they get their own way. Absent:

Good Sense and Sound Judgment People of gentle disposition wish that others operated with a level of tolerance and decorum.

Unfortunately, the folks that set the rules and draw the boundaries might favor one political party or another, might favor one religion over others.

So, who wants politicians to make rules about our schools, especially folks who have another political affiliation or religion than we do?

On the other hand, if we need to keep partisanship, bigotry and poor judgment out of our schools; someone has to set rules.

Let's just hope that whoever sets the rules allows out teachers to model freedom, tolerance and respect for others; and let's hope that our teachers make decisions based upon an open minded assessment of what is best for our nation's children.