

‘You Bet Your Boots’ Florida Conservatives Are Battling Textbooks Biased Against Christians

The Florida Legislature is likely to pass a bill this week giving parents more influence over school textbook choices, in a move that opponents say is rooted in anti-Muslim bias.

The bill followed organized protests by parents and conservative political groups in November over a world history textbook in Volusia County on Florida’s east coast.

Critics, who also protested in Central Florida counties, complained the book by educational publisher Prentice Hall devoted an entire chapter to Islam but not to other religions.

The book controversy has also been sucked into the political debate over Common Core education standards in the state, which are opposed by groups seeking greater local control over education. The national standards initiative details what kindergarten through 12th-grade students should command in mathematics and English.

The Volusia school board stood behind the textbook, finding that information about Christianity and Judaism was woven throughout the book in historical context.

Republican Senator Alan Hays of Umatilla said the bill was also motivated by complaints from other citizens about textbooks on literature and math. Hays said he personally disapproved of the history book.

“You bet your boots I do. I think it is completely unacceptable ... I don’t like the slanted view that is conveyed

in that textbook,” Hays said, without specifying further.

Hays’s initial bill, filed on Feb. 5, would have placed all decisions about textbooks and instructional materials in the hands of local school boards, a job currently handled by the state.

A watered-down version that passed the House on Monday and that the Senate will vote on would keep the state selection process but provide parents a forum to bring challenges before their local boards.

The chapter about Islam is not the only cause for concern, said State Rep. Dennis Baxley, a Republican from Ocala, “but information about sexual orientation and many different family-values issues.”

In 2013, legislators gave individual school boards the right to choose their own textbooks, but none opted to do so. Hays said he expects the Senate to pass the House version of his bill later this week.

Editing by David Adams and Prudence Crowther

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