# Republicans unite with right-wing Muslim groups to promote book-banning in Dearborn schools

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On Thursday night, hundreds of parents, students, and local politicians packed the Stout Middle School auditorium in Dearborn, Michigan to discuss a reactionary proposal to remove a series of books from the school district's public library.

The district, which serves some 20,100 students, has a library of nearly 500,000 physical books. The seven titles at the center of Thursday's meeting were all targeted for removal by parents based on LGBTQ+ issues and other questions related to sex and sexuality. These include titles such as *Push*, *The Lovely Bones* and *This Book Is Gay*.

Thursday's meeting was a continuation of a meeting of the Dearborn Public Schools Board of Education on Monday that was abruptly suspended when a boisterous crowd of over 100 people erupted in angry shouting. Both meetings were dominated by far-right elements calling for the book-banning.

On Monday, audience members held up signs reading: "Homosexuality Big Sin;" "Keep your sin in your own house;" "Keep your dirty books in the closet;" "Stop grooming our kids"; and "What ever happened to the good old days?"

In an attempt to lower tensions, placards were banned from Thursday's meeting.

According to the *Detroit News*, Monday's meeting was suspended just as public comments were set to begin. After board members seeking to address the crowd were drowned out by the audience, Dearborn Police Chief Issa Shahin was brought in to disperse the crowd.

The two events follow on the heels of months of agitation, including large rallies held last month just before schools were set to reopen.

The reactionary act of censorship, and particularly book-banning, has become a major element of the Republican Party's midterm elections strategy.

A study released earlier this year by PEN America, a non-profit that describes itself as "a literary and free expression advocacy organization," sheds light on the extent and character of this trend. The PEN study, covering the period from July 1, 2021, to March 31, 2022, documented 1,145 unique book titles banned across 86 school districts in 26 states, affecting over two million students.

Texas leads all other states in the number of bans, with 713 instances of censorship. At the start of this year, the right-wing Prosper Citizen Group demanded that Prosper Independent School District, north of Dallas, ban more than 80 titles from its libraries. It succeeded in getting 30 titles officially banned by March of this year.

Pennsylvania had 456 bans and Florida 204. Those three states combined account for the majority of bans. Other states with bans include Oklahoma, Kansas, Indiana, Tennessee, Virginia, Missouri, Georgia, New York and Utah.

While the book-banning campaign has largely been pursued by right-wing Christian Evangelicals, the Dearborn protest is being spearheaded by right-wing Muslim groups, making for a seemingly unlikely alliance.

Dearborn is a working class suburb of Detroit, home to the largest Arab-American community in the US and is part of a Democratic-leaning district. Those leading the censorship drive are manipulating and exploiting very real social grievances of working class residents of Dearborn.

The city has been hit with devastating floods over the past decade resulting from the area's shoddy and cash-starved infrastructure system. In 2014 and again in the summer of 2021, the homes of thousands of residents were flooded with rain water and backed-up sewage, for which the victims received completely inadequate compensation. This past July, the Great Lakes Water Authoridy denied all 24,000 claims submitted following the flooding in June of 2021.

Many aspiring Republican politicians quickly latched onto the events in Dearborn, using Thursday's event to garner support for their campaigns.

Ziad Abdalmalik, a Republican looking to take one of the seven City Council seats that are up for grabs in next month's election, was among the many Republicans who were front and center at the meeting. "A normal, psychologically sound and stable mind would come to a conclusion that specific material is nothing but sexually explicit," Abdalmalik told the audience.

Far-right GOP statewide candidates Kristina Karamo

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(secretary of state) and Matt DePerno (attorney general), as well as Republican lawmakers Jim Runestad and Michael Maddock, were also present.

DePerno and Karamo are of particular significance as they are running for two of the four top statewide offices in November. Both were endorsed at the state Republican convention despite the fact that neither has ever held public office before. The pair's political standing within the Republican Party is based entirely on their staunch support for former President Donald Trump, their embrace of the conspiracy theories peddled by QAnon, and their promotion of the lie that the 2020 election was stolen.

Karamo is the first election denier to win a Republican nomination for secretary of state in this election cycle, but she, along with DePerno, is part of a broader coordinated campaign to seize control of the electoral machinery in key "battleground" states ahead of the 2024 presidential election to ensure that Trump or some other fascist Republican candidate will prevail.

DePerno, a Kalamazoo lawyer, came to prominence through a lawsuit challenging the 2020 election results in Antrim County, a small, predominately Republican county in the northwest part of the state. Antrim was the only case in the entire United States where it was determined that election totals had been falsely reported, initially giving the county to Biden. The error was quickly corrected, but Antrim was nevertheless seized on by Trump and Republican election deniers as supposed "proof" that Trump was the real winner nationally and the Biden administration was illegitimate.

Karamo is a member of the Black Leadership Committee of Right to Life Michigan, the main anti-abortion group in the state. She made her name by making bogus claims of fraud in the counting of ballots in Detroit, where she was a Republican observer.

The fact that these two far-right figures are heavily involved in the Dearborn book-banning efforts is no surprise. They are seeking to appeal to sections of the middle class and working class through a union of religious fundamentalism and anti-gay bigotry.

De Perno told the crowd on Thursday: "This issue comes up in Dearborn, but it's the same issue we're seeing in Grand Rapids, we're seeing it in Kalamazoo, we're seeing it in Northern Michigan. We're seeing it everywhere, where school boards think they can ignore the rights of the parents in terms of how their children are educated."

Another far-right Republican, Nancy Sterniak, who is seeking a seat on the Plymouth-Canton Community Schools board, declared, "We are united in protecting the children."

These arguments are entirely cynical and demagogic. Trump and the Republicans have evinced no interest in "protecting the children" throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, working to send teachers and children back into unsafe, poorly ventilated, and crowded school buildings to catch the virus.

The same can be said for the Democrats, who, once in power in Washington, pursued the same deadly "herd immunity" and "forever COVID" policies, resulting in the deaths of thousands of educators and students and untold permanent health deficits from Long COVID. Both parties have, moreover, spent decades draining schools of funding, slashing teacher salaries, and promoting for-profit charter schools.

The campaign in Dearborn to ban LGBTQ+ books is bound up with the on-going transformation of the Republican Party into an openly fascistic party.

Other states have already advanced much further on these issues. In March, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis signed HB 1467 into law, which allows the banning of library books and instructional material. DeSantis also signed the notorious "Don't Say Gay" bill.

Trump has supported the banning of gender- and race-related books on numerous occasions as well.

It is noteworthy that, so far, the Democrats have been totally silent on the Dearborn controversy. Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib, whose district covers Dearborn and who is a Muslim, has yet to raise the issue in any forum. Tlaib is a member of the Democratic Socialists of America and supposed "progressive," part of the six-member "Squad" in the US House of Representatives. Her cowardly silence is consistent with her support for the Biden administration and its policies of war, austerity, and suppression of workers' right to strike against devastating inflation and intolerable working conditions, seen particularly in the White House's interventions against dock workers and rail workers.

Should the Democratic Party decide to weigh in on the book-banning in Dearborn, it will be a move driven entirely by electoral calculations. In Republican primary contests across the country this past spring and summer, Democratic PACs spent millions to boost the campaigns of far-right Trump election deniers running against Republican "moderates" based on the assumption that it would be easier to defeat more extreme right-wing candidates in the general election.

The Democratic Party has no ability or intention to fight against these bigoted and reactionary campaigns. On the contrary, the Democrats have contributed immensely to the toxic environment through their relentless promotion of identity politics and opposition to class politics that unite working people across lines of race, gender and sexual orientation.

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