

Oklahoma schools superintendent resigns to lead campaign to destroy “radical leftists in teachers union”

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Last Wednesday, Ryan Walters, Oklahoma’s Superintendent of Public Instruction, one of Trump’s attack dogs in the war against public education, announced he was resigning his post on September 30 to lead an organization called the Teacher Freedom Alliance. The right-wing group is dedicated to converting public schools into centers of political and religious indoctrination.

Announcing his resignation in a brief appearance on Fox News, Walters said his goal is to “destroy the teachers unions.” In an X post he wrote, “Radical leftists with the teachers union dominate classrooms and push woke indoctrination on our kids. We will build an army of teachers to defeat the teachers union once and for all.”

The Teacher Freedom Alliance, founded earlier this year, is bankrolled by a network of wealthy enemies of public education, including billionaire futures trader William Dunn, the Sarah Scaife Foundation, the Charles Koch Foundation and Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation. The organization, which has no more than 2,600 members nationwide, praised Walters for “fearlessly fighting the woke liberal union mob.”

Walters is deeply hated in Oklahoma and nationally for his filthy attacks on the democratic rights of educators and students. He has demanded prayer in schools, the hanging of the Ten Commandments in classrooms, and the inclusion of the Bible in curricula. According to Walters the Constitutional separation of church and state is a “myth,” and he has vowed to “put God back in schools.”

Under Walters’ direction, Oklahoma bought tens of thousands of Trump’s “God Bless the USA” bibles. The bibles contain copies of the US Constitution that conspicuously omit seventeen amendments, including the abolishment of slavery, the granting of voting rights to women and the limiting of a president’s time in office to

two terms.

Walters also insisted that families prove US citizenship in order to enroll their children in public schools in a clear violation of the landmark US Supreme Court ruling in 1982 case *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), which declared that all children, including those without legal immigration status, are entitled to a free public K-12 education under the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment.

Walters also said he would roll out an “America First” test for K-12 teachers arriving from California and New York before they can receive an Oklahoma license. The 50-question multiple-choice test, Walters said, was needed to protect against “radical leftist ideology fostered in places like California and New York.”

Just days before his resignation, Walters announced a partnership with Turning Point USA, the far-right group founded by Charlie Kirk, who was assassinated earlier this month. Walters vowed to establish TPUSA chapters in Oklahoma high schools, presenting the move as a means of combating “woke indoctrination.” Turning Point has long been a vehicle for cultivating a far-right cadre among young people, promoting climate denial, anti-LGBTQ bigotry, and outright fascist rhetoric.

One of his final acts in office was to present a proposed budget for K-12 education, which reduces spending by \$100 million from last year. The proposal, he said, was “the most fiscally responsible conservative budget in education.”

The resigning superintendent talks about “destroying the teachers unions” but the real fear of the Walters and his ilk is not the bureaucratized American Federation of Teachers and National Education Association. The leaders of these organizations, key players in the Democratic Party establishment, have done everything to block strikes in Chicago, Los Angeles and other cities that could

become the catalyst for a far broader movement against the existential threat to public education and democracy. This has only emboldened the fascist president and his supporters.

The union bureaucracy responded to Walters' statements with predictable complacency. AFT President Randi Weingarten said, "Today is a good day for Oklahoma's kids," and suggested that Walters' departure would bring a more hopeful climate for teachers and students. The Oklahoma Education Association (OEA) similarly hailed his resignation as "the beginning of a better Oklahoma" and urged state voters to "actively engage in the election process," i.e., vote for the Democrats.

The right-wing certainly wants to undermine the ability of the unions to finance the Democratic Party. But their calls for the smashing of the supposedly all-powerful "teachers unions" is really aimed at destroying whatever is left of the democratic and egalitarian character of public education, which the oligarchy sees as both dangerous and an unacceptable drain on their wealth.

Among rank-and-file educators there is a deep commitment to the fundamental right to a free, high-quality, and secular public education for all. Teachers have been in the front lines of defending immigrant children against Trump's ICE gestapo oftentimes hiding innocent children and parents when agents arrive on campus for their kidnapping operations.

Democrats and Republicans alike are also extremely fearful that a growing backlash of teachers could coalesce into a repeat of the 2018-2019 teachers strikes that spread across the country, including in Oklahoma, but this time on a far greater scale encompassing broader sections of the working class and one which the bureaucracy might not be able to control.

Walters is very familiar with the revolt of rank-and-file educators against the trade union bureaucracy. A history high school teacher in a rural district in 2018, Walters professed support for striking teachers' demands for higher wages but scabbed on the walkout.

Similar to West Virginia and Arizona that same year, the Oklahoma struggle erupted as a wildcat strike after years of surrender and collusion by the union bureaucracies with the bipartisan attack on public education. Teachers carried signs declaring, "This movement did not start with the OEA and it won't end with OEA."

But this powerful movement was sabotaged by a secondary layer around the union bureaucracy and

supporters of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), who worked to reassert the authority of the AFT and NEA bureaucracies and the Democratic Party, and shut down the struggle. As a result, Oklahoma continues to rank 49th in the US in per pupil spending.

Both the Democrats and the trade union bureaucrats fear a movement by the working class far more than a fascist dictatorship and the destruction of public education. But a movement from below is precisely what is needed. In every school and neighborhood, educators should form rank-and-file committees, independent of the union bureaucracies, to democratically discuss and formulate a strategy to mobilize the whole working class against the Trump administration.

These rank-and-file committees should draw in students, parents and all those who defend the right to public education and other democratic rights, to defend immigrant workers and young people, fight privatization, censorship and religious indoctrination. These committees must link up with other sections of the working class—healthcare workers, autoworkers, logistics workers, and beyond—who confront the same assault on jobs, living standards, and rights.

The struggle to defend public education is inseparable from the struggle against capitalism and for the expropriation of the oligarchy, whose continued domination of society is incompatible with democracy. Only through the building of a mass socialist movement of the working class, united across national boundaries, can the fascist danger be defeated and a future secured in which education is free, secular, and universal.

Get assistance in building an educators rank-and-file committee in your school, by filling out the form below.



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