

University students, protecting The First Amendment?

At the end of February, I will be on my way again to speak on the west coast of California. The last time I was invited to speak there, I spent an evening with a family in the San Francisco bay area. They told me how wonderful it was to speak freely about their values with my wife and me. Apparently their values weren't very welcomed in the public discourse of their geographical location. I can't imagine that things have gotten better in light of the recent Berkeley University protests over the presence of Milo Yiannopoulos at the college.

Winston Churchill made the statement, "Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry on as if nothing ever happened".

The First Amendment happens to be that truth for our American universities. Some of these Universities are requiring "Safe Zones" to be set up on the campus to be a place where students can shield themselves from uncomfortable or dissenting viewpoints.

That is why Tennessee lawmakers are introducing a bill in the their legislature this week that seeks to protect freedom of speech in the "Volunteer State" universities.

Both the Tennessee House and Senate introduced the "Tennessee Freedom of Speech on College Campus Bill" last Thursday, which seeks to prevent state universities from adopting policies that "shield individuals from ideas and opinions considered unwelcome, disagreeable or even deeply offensive."

The bill would prevent campus groups and school administrators from "closing off the discussion of ideas no matter how

offensive or disagreeable.”

In addition, the bill would require every state school to “be open to any speaker whom students, student groups, or members of the faculty have invited.”

The founders of America staked their struggle on the ability to speak, assemble, and petition freely. In fact, there would be no America if there were no First Amendment.

To be fair, freedom of speech has always been a double-edged sword. Constitutional law states few exceptions for free speech, such as speech presenting clear and present danger to national security or public safety; and speech soliciting crime, violence, obscenity, and defamation. Americans have always been able to express their values and opinions freely.

Colonial scholars – all scholars for that matter – would agree that having absolute emotional insulation and comfort at all times is extremely elementary and it’s anti-intellectual.

Founding father, author, publisher, and printer, Benjamin Franklin, cherished the freedoms protected in the First Amendment, understanding, “Freedom of speech is a principal pillar of a free government: When this support is taken away, the constitution of a free society is dissolved.”

“Free speech for me, but not for you,” has always been considered fascism, and that is the antithesis of liberty.

My suggestion to college students: quit being babies, use your intellect, speak back to what you disagree with, peacefully demonstrate and petition. Your emotional weakness and destructive tantrums are not a foundation that will sustain freedom.

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