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We Are Failing Our Children

By Matt A. Mayer

Over the past week, two events occurred involving my kids that made me realize that America is failing our children. We are raising what might be the most closed-minded and indoctrinated generation ever to grow up in this country. If we cannot course-correct and start teaching our kids to be open-minded, get informed and always be civil to those they oppose, then the current civic war rifling through our politics and social media lives will only grow worse as this generation comes to power.

Let me explain.

The first event occurred in California when my daughter and I were touring the University of California-Berkeley. As background, Berkeley is where the free speech movement started back in 1964-65 when students demanded the university respect their free speech rights.

Thanks to that movement, students across America secured their right to protest and speak their minds. America was made a better place because of that movement.

In recognition of that movement, the campus hosts the Free Speech Movement Café for students. Ironically, free speech isn't very free at Berkeley these days. Just last fall a conservative was sucker-punched simply for trying to sign up students for his group. As a result of that attack, we asked our tour guide if Berkeley was a safe place for my daughter given her conservative beliefs. The tour guide's response stunned us.

The guide said that of course she would be safe if she didn't say things that offended someone. Given the utter impossibility of knowing what would offend someone, that standard seemed incredibly loose and divorced from the whole concept of free speech.

Next, the guide said my daughter would be fine so long as she didn't join a "right-wing group like the College Republicans who have brought controversial speakers like Sean Spicer to campus." My eyes must have widened to the size of basketballs, as it seemed quite a stretch to refer to College Republicans as "right-wing" given the mainstream existence of such groups across college campuses. The former White House press secretary for President Trump may be many things, but Spicer is certainly not known for being a rhetorical bomb-thrower.

After our tour guide left, my daughter said there was just no way she could go to Berkeley despite liking what she saw. She said she felt that she would have to hide who she was and just

couldn't live that way for four years. She said she wouldn't feel safe.

The second event occurred at her high school. My daughters decided they wanted to start a club for conservatives at the school, as they felt there was no place for students with those beliefs to gather and talk. After designing a flyer and getting it approved by the principal, the girls and their friends hung nearly 200 flyers around the school. As she was doing it, a fellow student told her she was starting the "KKK" club and that she was a racist. Thankfully, my daughter isn't a snowflake so she just soldiered on without collapsing.

In less than 24 hours, nearly half of the flyers had been torn down, which has never happened to any other group's flyers including the center-left group's flyers. My daughters dutifully replaced the ones that had been torn down.

Perhaps you think these two events represent nothing more than "kids being kids," but I respectfully believe these events signal a critical societal and parental failure that could cascade into even worse behavior in the coming years. If free speech doesn't exist at the very campus that launched its movement, imagine how those young adults will act as they enter the real world. If high school students think it is OK to selectively tear down one group's flyers because they don't believe the same thing, imagine how that mindset will harden in the coming years.

If a fellow student feels perfectly comfortable calling another student a racist merely for putting up signs for a conservative group, imagine what other banal actions will provoke such venom.

As parents, we should be teaching our kids to be open-minded, inquisitive and respectful, not act like hooligans and haters. If we truly want to fix what ails America, we must start at home by teaching our kids the right lessons that they will carry throughout their lives.

The partisan madness must come to an end.

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