

Multiculturalists push their agenda

Want 'far right' School Board ousted

By Carol Innerst
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

A coalition called People for Mainstream Values, backed by Florida teachers unions, demanded yesterday that the governor oust three "far right" School Board members who want to teach children that American culture is superior to other cultures.

"They've already got us in a lawsuit," said Judy Pearson, one of the targeted members of the Lake County School Board. "I don't think the governor will give an ear to this ... or he'll laugh. We absolutely didn't do anything illegal."

In 1991, the Florida Legislature adopted a resolution on multicultural education that calls for "eliminating personal and national ethnocentrism so that they [pupils] understand that a specific culture is not intrinsically superior or inferior to another."

Last May, the all-female Lake County Board voted 3-2 to require instruction to "instill in our students an appreciation of our American heritage and culture such as: our republican form of government, capitalism, a free enterprise system, patriotism, strong family values, freedom of religion and other basic values that are superior to other foreign or historic cultures."

The Lake County Education Association, an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, swiftly responded with a lawsuit. The School Board's motion to dismiss the suit will be heard Aug. 24.

Gail Burry, president of the local union, described the School Board as controlled by the religious right.

"The world is aghast over the action of this School Board," Mrs. Burry said at a press conference yesterday.

Mary Pringle, co-chairman of People for Mainstream Values, said Mrs. Pearson, board Chairman Pat Hart and Vice Chairman Claudia Ramsey — the three who voted for the "superiority" teachings — "clearly violated state law ... and are guilty of malfeasance in office."

The group's letter to Democratic Gov. Lawton Chiles was sent by courier yesterday and should arrive today, according to Mrs.

Pringle. A spokesman in Tallahassee said the governor is in Washington.

Mr. Chiles could oust the board members from their elected positions, should he find them guilty of malfeasance.

Voting against the measure were board members Sandra Green and Phyllis Patten.

Literature from People for Mainstream Values describes the group as a "coalition of private citizens, business leaders, students and teachers, formed to battle extremist elements of the Lake County School Board."

"Suffice it to say that the name and mission goes hand-in-hand with the hit-squad-like tactics of People for the American Way," said Mike Russell, spokesman for the Christian Coalition. "What they've done is distort the nature and intent of these three School Board members to make it look like something outrageous to essentially reinforce patriotism."

"Lake County Teachers Association helped us," Mrs. Pringle said. "They gave us support. Without them, we couldn't have afforded postage. People are trying to say we're just puppets for them, but it's not true. I'm not a union person and neither is [co-chairman] Keith Mullins."

"I'm not a member of People for the American Way," Mrs. Pringle said. "I've had literature from them. I don't know if that helped formulate our policies. We were just upset with the school system. I started a new Republican Party here called the Grand Old Party because the Executive Committee of the county party is controlled by the Christian Coalition."

Gary Landry, public relations coordinator for the Florida Education Association, said the goal of People for Mainstream Values was "to recruit candidates to run against incumbents on the School Board."

Mrs. Hart's four-year term is up in November and she will not run again. The seats of the opponents of "superiority" are also up for grabs. Mrs. Patten is not running again, while Mrs. Green is seeking re-election.

The other two conservative board members have another two years to serve.

NATION

The Washington Times

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