

Citizens for Free Speech Defends High School Principal Who Was Suspended for Promoting Free Speech to Students

[CFFS Supports High School Principal Suspended for Promoting Free Speech to Students](#)

by [Patrick Wood](#), [Citizens for Free Speech](#)

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PRESS RELEASE

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Barton Thorne wanted his students to be aware of the prospect of losing their right to speak and be heard in the era of “cancel culture”, and his high school immediately illustrated his point—[by canceling him](#).

Thorne is the principal of Cordova High School in Shelby County, TN, and when he delivered his weekly video address to staff and students in January, just days after the January 6 riot on Capitol Hill, his message was clear: Beware the suppression of online speech and expression that does not conform to the prevailing orthodoxy of the moment.

It was a message not well-received by district administrators, who placed Thorne on paid leave after receiving complaints about the video’s contents. The district’s message was, in turn, not well-received by Citizens for Free Speech (CFFS).

“Here you have a high school principal,” stated CFFS founder and director Patrick Wood, “who is trying to advise his students of the importance of listening to all voices and viewpoints, who then has his own voice silenced by the school district for saying so. It’s unconscionable.”

The video message recorded by Principal Thorne warned that actions taken by the Big Tech social media platforms in limiting or banning online commentary today could have far-reaching implications for young students in their not-too-distant future.

“I’m only getting into this because as a young person, this is your future. You have a future ahead of you, and you will be developing your ideas and your values and the ways that you want to express yourself. But because these entities—Twitter, Facebook, Google, and Apple—are so powerful, and they have unilaterally made a decision of what you can and cannot see on their platforms, that’s a major issue and I want you to understand that.

“I want you to understand the problem that’s going to face you and your generation if there is no longer a marketplace, a free exchange of ideas.”

Thorne’s video address also referenced past cases of First Amendment suppression gone very wrong, including the Branch Davidian disaster in Waco, TX in 1993.

“What happens if one day a different group of people thinks that my religion is different, or funny, or should be brought into control, or should be filtered?” Thorne pondered. “Take that into speech. Maybe right now I’m in the norm, maybe right now my speech is not too outlandish, or too crazy...but what if a different group comes into power that no longer likes what I have to say, or how I think, or if they begin to think that I’m extreme?”

That question, according to Wood, is the most important one.

“There has been a sizable shift in the political winds in recent months, if not years,” explained the CFFS director, “and what was once considered acceptable speech then, is not considered acceptable now. If we allow a small monopoly of people to control what people can say and what they can hear, who’s to say it won’t be our own speech that is not acceptable six months from now? Or six years from now? It’s a dangerous game they’re playing.”

After serving a six-week suspension, ended only by a [federal lawsuit filed on his behalf](#) for violating his First and Fourteenth Amendment rights, Thorne was finally reinstated as principal. Despite returning to his position, Thorne’s lawsuit goes on, in part to help restore his tarnished reputation, and in part to demonstrate to his students the importance of defending one’s constitutional rights—which was the precise topic of his video address to begin with.

For more information about CFFS please visit www.CitizensForFreeSpeech.org.

Contact:

Bob Frantz

National Director of Communications

bob.frantz@citizensforfreespeech.org