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« Video from Rich Swier's challenged textbook appeal at the Sarasota County School Board meeting Races for Florida's Attorney General get edgier »

Textbook example: Tim Sukits wades into the battle between Rich Swier and the Sarasota County School Board

July 28th, 2010 by [Tim Sukits](#) in [Books, News, Politics, Sarasota-Manatee](#)



A line of textbook supporters wear T-shirts the read "Choose History, not His-Story."

The video of the July 20 Sarasota County School Board meeting that heard Dr. Rich Swier's "challenged material appeal" can be viewed [here](#), complete with some of our favorite quotes from the meeting and the times where you can find those speaker's comments.

I approach the Sarasota County Schools building a bit after 3 p.m. on Tuesday, July 20 to see a handful of people in front passing out white T-shirts with green lettering that reads "Choose History, not His-Story." As I pass through the foyer and enter the meeting room I spot about three dozen people wearing those shirts, scattered throughout a packed house of roughly 200. Sarasota County School Board Chair Shirley Brown helps her six-year-old grandson use a microphone to open the meeting with a recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance.

The stage is set for the day's main event. Dr. Richard Swier, editor of local conservative blog Red County, will have his chance to appeal the decision of a district advisory committee that denied his "request for reconsideration of instructional material," a formal complaint originally filed on April 25. Swier sought to have the textbook *World History: Patterns of Interaction* removed from the school curriculum, believing that it unfairly favors the religion of Islam over Christianity.

The right-wing positions adopted by Swier are no secret among the Sarasota community — former CL editor Cooper Levey-Baker regularly criticized his Red County posts on our blog. From advocating the dismemberment of homosexuals, to encouraging armed revolt against our own government, to calling a popular Gainesville solar panel-promoting tariff "stealth welfare for tree huggers," Swier is every local far-right-wingers Golden Boy. But this textbook fiasco appears to be the result of a new project he's working on.

Swier recently started a Sarasota chapter of ACT! for America, a group founded by noted Islamophobe Brigitte Gabriel, author of bestselling books *Because They Hate: A Survivor of Islamic Terror Warns America*, and *They Must Be Stopped: Why We Must Defeat Radical Islam and How We Can Do It*. ACT!'s mission statement says their goal is to, "inform, educate and mobilize Americans regarding the multiple threats of Islamofascism, and what they can and must do to protect themselves and their country against this determined enemy." Shortly after Swier's appeal was granted, Gabriel posted a blog on the Red County website titled, "Major Development on the

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Textbook Front! ACT! for America's Sarasota Chapter Achieves a First in Florida State History!
Apparently, she's quite fond of exclamation points.

Over the course of his anti-textbook crusade, Swier exchanged several emails with the **School Board** and **Superintendent Lori White**, including one titled "**Joys of Muslim Women**," attributed to former Muslim and human rights activist **Nonie Darwish** warning of Islam's intention to destroy Western civilization by imposing **Sharia law**, although much of the article refers to Darwish in the third person. The email is **commonly circulated** among **Glenn Beck** fans. Swier also supplied the board with reading material like *The Muslim Masquerade: An Unveiling of Islam's Façade*, and *The Trouble with Textbooks: Distorting History and Religion*, which specifically lists *World History: Patterns of Interaction* as a book favorable to Islam.

The educational material that Swier, who ran unsuccessfully for a School Board position in 2002, has recommended to replace the contended textbook is a ten-part series of 64-page books by **Mason Crest Publishers** called *World of Islam*. The cover of one volume in the series, titled *Radical Islam*, depicts an AK-47 sitting atop an Arab-style garment soaked in blood. The board feels that the series is not a suitable replacement, thanks both to the \$229 price tag (compared to the current book's \$83), and because the series is classified at a sixth-grade reading level.



After about 50 minutes of proceedings dealing with the poor nutritional value of cafeteria food and a **\$2.5 million gift to county schools from the Venice Community Foundation**, the board votes to open up discussion on the "resolution of challenged material appeal." Brown announces that 47 cards have been approved, each allowing concerned citizens three minutes to speak. After the public gets its turn, Swier will have ten minutes, then ten minutes for a review committee member, then they each get a five minute rebuttal. It's going to be a long afternoon.

The first speaker is a sweet little silver-haired woman named Barbara Vaughn, who starts out talking about her experience living in the Middle East and how close she became with many of the Muslims whom she lived and worked with, right before descending into a rant about their plot to take over Western society. "This textbook is the camel's nose under the tent," she says. "The truly moderate Muslims are those that believe they can win by degrees while we are busy being politically correct or not paying attention. To them victory is a matter of incremental jihad."

Next up is John Scolaro, a smooth speaker who keeps nobody guessing with an instant ratification of "everything previously said, cited, presented and fact-checked by Dr. Swier and his supporters both today and in the past." He goes on to say, "terrorism transcends history into our daily lives. It affects the lives of our soldiers, which one day many of our school children will become."

The next six speakers take the podium in opposition to the textbook before Harvey Gochberg rises as the first in support. "I can't tell you which religion wins the most killed of innocents," he says. From here the cards begin to shuffle, and the players start raising the stakes.

Esther Rachwal takes the mic and reminds the board members about the video she sent to all of them on the horrors of Sharia law. "It is unbelievable as to what Sharia law is doing to the women of those countries," she says. "The most frightening is what happens when Muslims and Islam reach a certain percentage of the population. I think people need to understand that we have to be careful."

Luckily, good ol' Murray Blueglass lightens the mood a bit by reciting a line from a 1942 Rogers and Hammerstein musical: "'You've got to be taught to hate and hate, you've got to be taught before it's too late, you've got to be taught because you're seven and eight.' That's what I'm hearing today."

Jacqueline Tutt, co-chairperson of the **Women's Interfaith Network**, a women's organization that represents every religion under the sun, offers the day's first truly cultured perspective. "I don't think you're going to find a textbook about religion that anyone will agree to," she says. "As a Christian and an African-American, I could well hate every white Christian for the terrorism that has been put on my people in this country. But I don't. It is not the way that we progress."

Gene Tischer's is the next card dealt as he takes the stand. "We used to be a Judeo-Christian nation and we've moved away from that because it's politically correct or whatever," he says, "but don't go to the other shore and demote Christianity and elevate Islam. Slowly Islam becomes something very attractive without people even knowing what they're buying into." He then reminds the board to watch those videos Esther sent them.

Finally, after all the religious back and forth, Zaid Smith, a doctor of neuroscience, shows up with a healthy dose of solid reasoning and some profound thoughts about following in the footsteps of our forefathers. "I'm struck by the optimism of the opponents to this textbook," he says. "They seem to believe that high school students open their textbook, read it very carefully, remember it, and change their lives as a result. This textbook has been here for five years, and I don't think there have been any cases of people renouncing Christianity, capitalism, or converting to Islam as a result. I don't think this is really about the textbook at all. I think we should run with a different sort of optimism, the optimism of **Tom Jefferson** and **Tom Paine**, who decided to take a chance on a country where **tolerance and openness and freedom of religion prevailed.**"

The first person to speak with any actual religious authority is Reverend Tricia Dillon Thomas. As it turns out, she's a bit more open than some of her fellow Christians in the room. "I have to say as a parent that I thank God for the **separation of church and state**, because my religion does not follow these men's religion," she says, after passionately debunking many of Swier's claims. "The opponents of this textbook have been painting broad strokes about Islam and the Muslim community because of actions of a small group of folks that have perpetuated hate."



Swier talks with Holland in the foyer as his claims are rebuked in the meeting room.

From this point on the cards cease to shuffle so randomly. 25 people in a row rise to voice their support for the continued use of *World History: Patterns of Interaction*, many of them Muslims detailing the intricacies and common misunderstandings surrounding their faith. They point out why the **review of the material** by **Dr. Terri K. Wonder**, a doctor of Middle Eastern studies who is Swier's primary expert referenced, is flawed in many ways.

Many of the supporters are troubled that Swier had apparently not talked to an actual Muslim when compiling the evidence for his case. They explain that **jihad** is not actually one of the five pillars of Islam; that it is not a call to holy war against Western culture; and how Islamic women are not seen as second-class citizens, all of which Swier and others opposed to the textbook deny.

Other complaints posed by Swier are rebuked more with common sense than religious knowledge. Swier has a problem with the book's contention that Christians "regard" Jesus as the Son of God rather than "know" he is. He also finds fault in the book's referring to the **Prophet Mohammad** with a capital "P," a simple case of textbook grammatical style, as the book uses a lowercase "p" later when not using the term as an official title. Swier asserts that many more of the book's pages are dedicated to Islam than are toward Christianity. In reality, there are 23 pages devoted to Christianity and 21 to Islam.

Swier may have taken many of these rebuttals into account, if he was in the room. As it becomes apparent that supporters will have control of the microphone for some time, I notice Swier is mysteriously absent from his seat. I escape to the foyer to find him talking to an angry opponent of the book, later revealed to be Carol Holland. I approach Swier, shake his hand, and ask why he left the meeting. As he begins to speak about how only in a Judeo-Christian Republican nation could we have such a free exchange of religious discourse, a blond woman in a pink tank top bursts through the door toward Swier, exclaiming, "the whole God-damned Muslim nation is in there!" Holland is quick to hush her.

Eventually, Swier returns to the room and is soon invited to come forth and make his appeal. He begins by asking the crowd to observe a moment of silence for **Sakineh**, the 43-year-old woman in Iran who is accused of adultery, claiming that he just received a text message that she is being stoned to death at this very moment. That turns out to be **false**. Swier goes on to repeat many of the points from Dr. Wonder's review, the same ones that have just been debunked for an hour and that review committee member Roger Bone will soon shoot holes through officially. "Dr. Wonder is an expert in historiography and just returned from working for the Department of Defense, where she was recruited and spent two years in Iraq," says Swier. "If anyone understands Islam and how this

textbook misportrays not only Islam but Western civilization and the **free market system**, she is the one."

A tense moment comes when Brown asks Swier if he can back up his claims with students who have been negatively affected by the textbook, as at least five students had stood up in support of the book. "I don't know why [parents] would go to you rather than come to us," she says. "So who are these parents and students?" Swier starts to go into how he got involved in the issue, before Brown interrupts him: "Mr. Swier, all I ask is a list. You're not answering the question."

During their closing statements the board members each give their reasons why they will be voting to keep the book, effectively taking the anticipation out of the final vote. At one point during Brown's comments she says, "**This is not a Judeo-Christian nation**, but a nation of Judeo-Christians, founded by people **fleeing religious persecution in Europe**." This prompts pink tank-top lady, who I now know to be Eileen Green, and others to storm out of the room flailing their arms in disgust.



Green storms out of the meeting room

I approach Green and Holland in the parking lot to find out what they think about the decision. "What do we think about it? I'm disgusted! I'm disgusted with these communist progressives running my schools," says Green. "I'm paying my taxes and we have no rights. This is called **social justice**, not **equal justice**... And the **Koran preaches that you must kill all Christians and Jews**." Holland adds to the dissent: "When they first started I knew what the vote was going to be," she says, "because I know how bureaucracies are. They're all liberal, left-wing, and they see nothing wrong with the textbook... Don't tell me that Muslim is a religion of peace. Starting in 1972, everything that has happened, everybody who was killed, that was peaceful?... Believe me, if you are Muslim and you do not believe what they believe, **you do not have the freedom to say I don't believe you**."

Soon Swier walks up to join the two women. "I'm going to take the board's recommendation and I'm going to appeal it to the state board, to the **commissioner of education**," he says. "The reason I went this route is I'm a military guy and I believe in going through the chain of command. You take the necessary steps along the way, and then each level says things about the book. Fortunately, what you end up having is some public officials that say things that are sort of strange. One of the things that really upset a bunch of people and they walked out around me was that America is not a Judeo-Christian nation. That really struck a negative chord."

I then ran into Farah Abid, an 18-year-old Muslim-American who recently graduated from Pine View and had enjoyed using the textbook. I ask her what she thinks about people storming out of the room. "Seriously, that's what 7th graders do," she says. "Kids at Pine View, once they get into 10th grade, don't even do that anymore. I think that just shows their intolerance to just listen to other people's ideas. And honestly, had they actually listened to all of our ideas, they probably could have done better today."



Textbook supporters rejoice after hearing the board's decision.

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16 Responses to "Textbook example: Tim Sukits wades into the battle between Rich Swier and the Sarasota County School Board"

1. *rich n. phaemus* Says:
July 28th, 2010 at 10:35 am
Good coverage of this issue, Timberland.
In times of economic challenge, the drive to blame, censor and burn must be fought. Hitler used the economic troubles of pre-WWII Germany to focus blame upon Jewish bankers as the scapegoats, to disastrous result.
In our post-9/11 world, we have experienced a rapid erosion of our hard won civil liberties and freedoms in the name of 'Homeland Security.' Thanks for taking a stand on this issue and helping to counter the potential for book banning and burning. Japanese and German history textbooks have had entire sections expurgated where the actions of the host countries are not the most favorable. The only way we, as a country, can avoid mistakes in the future is to remember the past – accurately.
2. *No deposit poker bonuses | Poker For Free* Says:
July 28th, 2010 at 1:53 pm
[...] Textbook example: Tim Sukits wades into the battle between Rich ... [...]
3. *The Four Most Popular Non-Conventional Poker Games Explored | Poker Shuffle Pad* Says:
July 28th, 2010 at 2:02 pm
[...] Textbook example: Tim Sukits wades into the battle between Rich ... [...]
4. *Shirley Brown* Says:
July 28th, 2010 at 2:06 pm
You accurately portrayed the events of the hearing and gave some background that I couldn't get from the podium. Swier headlined his post with Board Chair claims "This isn't a Judeo-Christian" with no mention of the rest of the quote. I feel a little bit like Shirley Sherrod. I can't tell you the hate mail and calls I received. Thank you for getting the whole quote down.
5. *r k* Says:
July 28th, 2010 at 2:43 pm
Is this the same Rich Swier involved with the Vinyl fest thing? What kind of doctor is he?
6. *Veronica Pastore* Says:
July 28th, 2010 at 2:57 pm
r k:

Rich Swier Jr., who organized the Vinyl Music Festival, is Dr. Rich Swier (Sr.)'s son.

Different guys. Same name.
7. *Sam T.* Says:
July 28th, 2010 at 3:58 pm
I wonder if anyone has done a cost analysis of how much school district money (and time) Rich Swier has wasted? Did he offer to pay for those new text books or should that be tagged onto the bill?
8. *Swedish Chef* Says:
July 28th, 2010 at 4:08 pm
Veronica:

Does Sr. have any involvement with the HuB, financial or otherwise?
9. *What is Online Poker? | Poker Talks* Says:
July 28th, 2010 at 5:02 pm
[...] Textbook example: Tim Sukits wades into the battle between Rich ... [...]
10. *Video from Rich Swier's challenged textbook appeal at the Sarasota County School Board meeting | the 941* Says:
July 28th, 2010 at 6:01 pm
[...] Suncoast « Download your free PDF of Merl Reagle's latest Puzzler, "Bugs at 70" Textbook example: Tim Sukits wades into the battle between Rich Swier and the Sarasota County School... [...]
11. *Underground London ? Finding A Poker Game If You're Stuck In London For The Night | Poker Reserved* Says:
July 28th, 2010 at 7:02 pm
[...] Textbook example: Tim Sukits wades into the battle between Rich ... [...]
12. *Tim Sukits* Says:
July 28th, 2010 at 7:26 pm
Thanks Chairwoman Brown, I strive to keep my reporting as accurate and fact-based as possible. A quote taken out of context is not really a quote. I'm not sure if you noticed, but the link on that quote goes to Article 11 of the Treaty of Tripoli, which was ratified by the U.S. Senate on June 7, 1797 and signed by President John Adams three days later. It states:

"As the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion,—as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion, or

tranquility, of Mussulmen,—and as the said States never entered into any war or act of hostility against any Mahometan nation, it is declared by the parties that no pretext arising from religious opinions shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries."

So, according to that document, you are quite correct in your assertion that "This is not a Judeo-Christian nation." Although I'm sure all that hate mail makes you wish you could take it back. You can't change a mind that refuses to be changed. All you can do is provide the correct information and hope for the best. If they choose to trust sources that provide incorrect or incomplete information, well, that is the very definition of ignorance:

ig- no- rance: lack of knowledge, education, or awareness. (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary)

I encourage readers to fish around some of the other links in this story. I spent way too much time on this post, and it would be a shame to let all that good research go unseen. I also encourage readers to be aware of bias in the media. If they are giving opinions, it's not news. Punditry is not reporting. In fact, if it's not coming from AP, PBS or BBC, it most likely contains some hint of bias.

As for the relationship between Rich Swier Jr. and Sr., I believe they had been involved in business ventures in the past, but have since gone in separate directions. Of course, I'd hate to spread false information, so I'd suggest talking to them, as the truth can only be obtained from those who know the facts.

13. *Ruta Jouniari* Says:

July 29th, 2010 at 11:00 am

Thank you for accurately quoting what happened during the meeting . Also thank you for quoting people correctly, as a quote and not dropping out words to change the meanings. I guess the benefits of all of this is to highlight how many views in life there are. Thanks for a job well done, Tim!

14. *arlene pearlman* Says:

July 29th, 2010 at 11:53 am

Reading honest reporting lifts my heart. Thanks for a superb job. Education is the tool which prepares students for their future, and their future demands that they understand people on a global scale. This history book gives them that footing and also opens the door for honest discussion. They benefit by having knowledge of all the people who inhabit this earth -- all nations, all religions. This book probably should be required reading for adults of all ages.

15. *mdestape* Says:

July 30th, 2010 at 1:18 pm

Good job. Hope you didn't contract any ideological contagions.

16. *Nancy Krohngold* Says:

July 31st, 2010 at 9:27 am

Once again, great reporting, Tim. Keep up the good work!

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