



Representative Teresa Fedor

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To the members of this committee of the Constitutional Modernization commission, thank you for inviting me to speak.

I oppose the Gunlock proposal for an all-appointed state board of education. An appointee is not the voice of the people. An appointed board- in this day and age- equals privatization. I consider Gunlock's proposal a corporate one, where the board would not have to answer to the people. Appointed members aren't as accountable or accessible, as they are naturally beholden to the one person who appointed them. It's too easy for them to dismiss the needs of the people.

This room tells the story of where we are in Ohio in terms of modernizing education. Early on in my 16 years in the statehouse, I spent time in this basement, where people can barely breathe, dealing with the all important school funding issue during the DeRolph years. As a newly elected state official I felt the tangible dismissal of the importance of the people's voice in education when I went from the finance committee to this cold, damp, small, most uncomfortable room in the statehouse. We're talking about our children's education, the most important subject in Ohio, and it feels like we're being put in time out.

We have the capability to share these proceedings with the whole public- the technology purchased for public access back in the 90s lies unused. Or we can move upstairs, where I had anti-human trafficking sessions broadcast to the

public. So that's my first recommendation. The committee should use a room that reflects the level of respect the public deserves, that's connected and wired so people know what's going on at the statehouse. Thomas Jefferson, who cherished decentralized public education, wrote, "Educate and inform the whole mass of the people... They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty."

As an educator I look to the words we used. How do we define our Republic? It is "a state in which supreme power is held by the people and their elected representatives, and which has an elected president rather than a monarch." Under an older definition, a Republic is a group "with a certain equality between its members."

The current state board of education is flawed because there is no equality between the appointed and elected members. The elected members are chosen by the people of their district, whereas the appointed members are chosen by the head of our executive branch. The innate inequity lends itself to dysfunctional governance. The cure is never to remove the people's voice, but to remove the barriers to the people's ability to select their choice as a representative.

The current conflict within the board- revealed by federal scrutiny of the flawed \$71 million charter school funding application- is predicted within social science literature. A group of "experts" chosen by one person is likely to lead us astray. Scott E. Page, a Professor of Complex Systems, Political Science and Economics at the University of Michigan, has studied the benefits of having a diversity of people attack a problem. His research concludes that diverse groups of problem solvers outperform the groups of the best individuals in a field at solving problems. The reason: the diverse groups get stuck less often than the so-called experts, who tend to think similarly.

Mr. Gunlock has labeled conflict within the board as political because not everyone on the board agrees with some policy decisions and it tends to split on party lines. Yet, every argument put forth during debate within the board is bolstered by reasoning that transcends politics. This past summer's scandal

within the Ohio Department of Education fueled a backlash from board members deeply concerned about the integrity of the department. Their challenge to fellow board members for a politically neutral investigation called the department to account for its actions. Without diversity, the department could continue to act with impunity in its operation outside of the law.

We have heard the claim that an appointed board will produce more qualified members. This idea shows a remarkable distrust, even a disdain for Ohio voters. Jefferson writes:

“Whenever the people are well-informed, they can be trusted with their own government.” Do we not trust the people to make decisions?

We need a state school board that’s closest to the people.

You’ve heard the Gunlock proposal- I’d like to present the Fedor proposal in two parts:

1. That only elected board members be office holders. The president and vice president must be elected, not appointed, members.
2. That the Ohio State Board of education be all-elected, not all-appointed or the current hybrid, which was not contemplated by the initial establishment of the state board in 1953.

In closing, I request that the next several meetings allow public input on my proposal and that the committee hold them in a more accessible room- wired for live streaming and video archive so the public can participate in the Constitutional Modernization process.

Education is the most important governmental duty we oversee. It should not be relegated to one party, or one individual. Let democracy do what democracy does best. Let all voices be heard by giving voice to all who wish to be heard.