

Not long ago, teaching civics felt like planting seeds of hope. Every lesson reminded me — and my students — that the American system was built to protect liberty.

I would tell my kids, “You see, we have this amazing system in our country. These three branches share power. That means no branch can ever get too powerful. It’s called checks and balances — and our founders built it this way on purpose.”

“But what do you mean?” they’d ask. “Can’t the president just decide something and make it happen like a king would?”

“No, kids. That’s what makes our system different. That person can’t just make sweeping decisions and change the country — because the other branches keep him in check.”

At least, that’s what I used to say. Now, I don’t know how to answer.

I share these words today not just as a teacher, but as someone who has spent years believing in the strength of our democratic system. Lately, that belief has been tested — not only by the questions I can no longer answer in class, but by the very real threats facing public education in our state and in our country.

The latest Wyoming legislative session left me and many fellow educators feeling a terrifying attack on public education. Public funds going into private hands, control over teaching materials, and firearms in our hallways...I never thought it would come to this. And yet, here we are. Our legislators have traded common sense for headlines and power — and it’s our kids who pay the price.

Freedom is a word these politicians like to bounce around, but it has no meaning the way they use it. We have lost sight of real freedom.

Freedom isn’t fear.

It isn’t censorship.

It isn’t locking up books or loading up classrooms with guns.

Freedom IS education.

Horace Mann is often considered “The Father of American Education.” In his report to the Massachusetts Board of Education in 1848, he said, “Education...beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men...it gives each man the independence and the means, by which he can resist the selfishness of other men.”

Right now - with the selfishness of powerful men playing out every day - let us not forget the power of education. There’s a reason public education is under attack — because educating people works! Because it empowers! And because it teaches people how to think, not what to think.

The parties are being asked to turn against each other, education being deemed “liberal” and “far right,” because it is easier to divide and conquer. But if we believe in liberty, in truth, and in democracy, then we must defend our schools through unity - with the shared goal of truth and a tomorrow built on the rule of the people.

Some may ask why I don't shout these thoughts from the rooftops - why I hide behind someone else more willing to speak. I'll tell you why: because retaliation is real. Because in today's climate, speaking truth as a public educator can come at a cost. But for all of us who are afraid, I want to say that quiet courage matters, too.

Let us plant those seeds of hope again, and create a world of true freedom and liberty for our children to enjoy.