Parents accuse BYU, Alpine district of socialist conspiracy

Caleb Warnock - Daily Herald | Posted: Sunday, April 11, 2010 12:40 am

Some local parents are leveling serious charges against Alpine School District and Brigham Young University.

Parents are saying district and university officials are participating in "a deliberate course of action to subvert the moral fabric of a society with the goal to eliminate the worship of deity and replace it with the worship of man."

These parents acknowledge their argument is both complex and far-reaching. If true, the charge means the school district is either wittingly or unwittingly part of a nationwide socialist movement. Parents say it is the manifestation of a specific warning given by LDS Church President Ezra Taft Benson, who had named names in the warning. More on that in a moment.

Depending on your point of view, the parents may just be making much ado of nothing. Whatever you believe, concerned parents are asking other district parents to form their own opinion about whether the district is working to remove God from the classroom -- and history.

Conspiracy?

Oak Norton, one of the most outspoken critics of Alpine School District and founder of UtahsRepublic.org, begins with the premise that truth can only be defined by God. He sees BYU and Alpine School District as part of a national conspiracy working to carefully teach the nation's children to believe that the United States government is based on the power of people, rather than the power of God.

This effort, he said, is guided by "the motives of those who are trying to change our language and remove the notion that we are a republic with natural rights bestowed upon us by God."

As proof of his accusations, Norton offers a detailed logic.

Emblazoned about 30 feet across one wall of the school district's headquarters is a plank of the district's motto: "Enculturating the Young into a Social and Political Democracy." District officials acknowledge this comes from a BYU initiative on education associated with national education writer John Goodlad. Norton said that Goodlad is a proponent of John Dewey, one of the original signatories on the first Humanist Manifesto, a document that describes itself as a religion meant to transcend and replace deity-based religions. The manifesto was based on the Communist Manifesto.

According to Norton, John Goodlad is the recipient of an award named for Dewey, and also has been a keynote speaker as a conference focusing on Dewey.
"Goodlad came to BYU in 1983 to establish the Public School Partnership with five surrounding school districts," Norton said. "Goodlad has done this numerous times with universities and school districts around the nation. BYU's education department drew heavily on his book entitled 'The Moral Dimensions of Teaching.' One of Goodlad's 'moral dimensions is entitled 'enculturating the young into a social and political democracy,' which is the text and controversy surrounding Alpine School District's large plaque inside their teacher development center."

Goodlad, according to Norton, taught that parents do not own their children and they have no natural right to fully control their education.

"Education is a task for both parents and state," Norton quotes Goodlad as teaching. "The state, parents and children all have interests that must be protected ... Education, public schooling, is necessary to maintain citizenry capable of maintaining a democracy. The knowledge of how to run a democracy is not possessed by all parents equally ... In the quest for learning, educators must resist the quest for certainty ... So it is with morals and patriotism ... [There is a] belief in some that there exists 'objective knowledge' and a 'correct' view of the world. This is incorrect. All knowledge is partial and subjective."

**To some, alarm bells sound**

To Norton and many other parents, all this rings alarm bells.

"Which of you believe the state has a right to your children and has interests that must be protected in the education of your child?" Norton told the Daily Herald. "Which of you believes it is up to the schools to educate your children because parents don't understand how to run a democracy? Which of you believe morals and knowledge are subjective?"

Goodlad "proceeded to get BYU to become a founding member of the National Network for the Renewal of Education," Norton said. According to that group's Web site, the NNER "pursues the Agenda for Education in a Democracy ... Democracy, while certainly not without its flaws, seems to offer the best hope of enabling us to live together in relative peace and prosperity. This is because democracy has a great virtue that the others generally lack: real democracy strives to ensure that everyone in a society contributes to the decision-making processes that affect their lives."

Norton sees all this as skewing toward moral relativism.

"Do you as a parent want Goodlad's and Dewey's agenda enculturating your child into a social and political democracy?" he said.

As proof that his alarm is more than just alarmism, Norton offers this quote from LDS Church President Ezra Taft Benson: "I feel to warn you that one of the chief means of misleading our youth and destroying the family unit is our educational institutions. There is more than one reason why the Church is advising our youth to attend colleges close to their homes where institutes of religion are available. It gives the parents the opportunity to stay close to their children, and if they become alerted and informed, these parents can help expose the deceptions of men like Sigmund Freud, Charles Darwin, John Dewey, John Keynes and others. There are much worse things today that can happen to a child than not getting a full education."

That should be enough to give local parents pause, Norton said.
"So is enculturating our young into a social and political democracy harmless?" Norton said. "Hardly. When a group of people set on a deliberate course of action to subvert the moral fabric of a society in the goal to eliminate the worship of deity and replace it with the worship of man, we come to the crossroads of our culture, and must make that final decision as to who the God of this land really is.

"The question we must now address is, with this knowledge coming into in the public space, will those who accepted the good parts of Dewey's and Goodlad's teachings which no doubt attracted them in the first place, now recognize and reject the poison agenda that came with it? If there is not a purging of the poison from the well, the 99.9-percent crystal clear water will still continue to harm and kill those that partake of what deceptively appears to be a cool and refreshing well of truth."

The rebuttal

The Daily Herald provided both BYU and Alpine School District with the accusations of Norton and other parents and asked both the university and the district to respond.

"The teacher preparation programs at Brigham Young University strive to prepare educators who act with moral integrity and possess social and academic competence," said Richard Young, dean of the BYU David O. McKay School of Education. "Our goal is to graduate future teachers who can safeguard the learning of all students by teaching and caring for each student as an individual. We expect our graduates to be educators who can prepare today's youth to think deeply, to read and write well, to analyze and solve problems, and to be responsible citizens.

"As one enters the west doors of the David O. McKay Building on our campus, the center of attention is a display featuring the educational philosophy of President David O. McKay. The quotes displayed represent the core mission of the David O. McKay School of Education. Among these quotes we read: 'The teaching of religion in public schools is prohibited, but the teaching of character and citizenship is required.' On another occasion President McKay stated, 'It is well for educators everywhere when teaching the young to have in mind the three C's as well as the three R's mentioned so proverbially. By the three 'Cs' I mean character, conduct, citizenship.'

"These values have long formed the basis for BYU's teacher-education program, with the goal being to build a foundation of better-trained educators and better-educated citizens throughout the United States and the world."

Rhonda Bromley, spokeswoman for Alpine School District, said the district "will continue to move forward focusing on student achievement and progress. We will continue to include parents and respect the roles each of us play in the education of students. We will continue to have stewardship in preparing students to become contributing members of society. The school board will continue to follow processes in making future decisions as well as reviewing things that are already in place.

"If anyone has concerns about the direction and goals of Alpine School District, we invite you into our schools to see for yourself what is going on. We invite you to speak with members of the PTA as well as school and district community council. We are excited about the wonderful things happening in our classrooms every day between teachers and students. Alpine School District is transparent and committed to our mission, vision, values and goals."

What it means

Coming along with the broader questions about moral relativism and control of a child's education is a heated discussion of the meaning of a single phrase -- the last four words of the district's mission statement: "Enculturating the Young into a Social and Political Democracy."

This phrase has sent chills through many parents.

Concerned parent Jared Carman points out that social democracy is defined by Merriam-Webster as a political movement advocating a gradual and peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism by democratic means, or a democratic welfare state that incorporates both capitalist and socialist practices.

"As an example, Western European countries, while casually called 'democracies,' are more accurately described as 'social democracies,' wherein the people have voted for themselves a socialist welfare state," Carman said. "Such a state is characterized by a powerful central government that provides for the 'equitable distribution' of the citizens' wealth. These European forms of government are quite different than America's Republic, where the government has enumerated and limited powers, mainly the safeguarding of the rights of the American people.

"In response to public outcry, the ASD school board explained that for them, the phrase 'social and political democracy' refers to the social and political skills children need to successfully contribute in America's culture of freedom. This explanation defies reason, in light of universally accepted definitions of the words, and especially given the origin and context of the phrase 'Enculturating the Young into a Social and Political Democracy.'"

Norton said the word democracy does not appear in the Constitution at all; rather, the Constitution guarantees every state a republican form of government.

The basics

Monarchy, aristocracy and democracy are each types of republics, said F. Dennis Farnsworth Jr., professor of political science at Utah Valley University. The most important component of a republic is "the adherence to the rule of law, which means that especially those in high places may not with impunity break the law," he said.

Democracy is government by the people. The people vote the officials into power or fulfill the responsibilities of public policy themselves.

Ancient Athens was an example of a government which was both a republic and a democracy. The rule of law was enshrined and law breakers were punished. Athenians voted officials into power in some cases, but in many cases, did the work of government themselves: fought the wars, manned the juries, served in the senate, etc.

The U.S. "began as a republic -- an aristocratic republic. Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, etc., were all aristocrats," Farnsworth said."During the days of Andrew Jackson the aristocratic republic transformed itself into a democratic republic, with the common people having a say in things and getting elected to political positions. A democratic republic is what the U.S. remains to this day, with the people having a voice in the formation of public policy. This evolution of the political system in the United States should be viewed as natural and normal and not the result of conspiracy. It's OK to educate the youth to the effect that the U.S. is a democracy as well as a republic because, in fact, it is."
Words matter

That the U.S. form of government is a Republic is indisputable, said concerned parent Jared Carman. The Constitution states, "The United States shall guarantee to every state in this union a republican form of government."

"By contrast, the meaning of the word 'democracy' depends entirely upon the context in which it appears," Carman said. "Unfortunately, modern sources give two very different meanings. Merriam-Webster defines a democracy as 'a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly, or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections.'"

According to Carman, the first definition is the original meaning of the word "and was both warned against by America's founding fathers and promoted by America's enemies."

Both Karl Marx, author of the Communist Manifest, and communist leader Vladimir Lenin taught that democracy is the road to socialism, Carman said. In contrast, John Adams, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, warned that democracy is fleeting.

"While some speak loosely of the American form of government as a democracy, doing so invites ambiguity, as one never knows which definition is intended: the first, direct democracy, as meant by Adams, Marx and Lenin, or the second, representative democracy," Carman said. "The squishy term 'democracy' appeared 13 times on the mission statement page of the Alpine School District Web site, prior to March 9. In an effort to clarify, the board recently offered their own definition of democracy as a 'type of republic.' This unique definition only adds to the confusion."