

# News From The States

# EVENING WRAP

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By [Kate Queram](#)

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I went to a movie theater last night to watch “[Crossroads](#),” a very terrible/classic movie starring Britney Spears. I did this for two reasons: First, why would you not do this, and second, the ticket came with a (very slightly) advance copy of Spears’ memoir. I have already read half of it ([IYKYK](#)), which is enough for me to predict, confidently, that it will soon be banned from school libraries across the country in an effort to protect children from racy topics like underage drinking and Justin Timberlake Being The Worst. And that is a shame for many reasons, including the simple fact that it is, ultimately, a pretty good read.



## The Big Takeaway

As both a lifelong reader and a mom who will soon have two children in the public school system, I loathe the idea of book bans. [Most of us feel this way](#), it turns out — 71% of voters oppose removing books from public libraries, and two-thirds object to banning reading materials from school libraries.

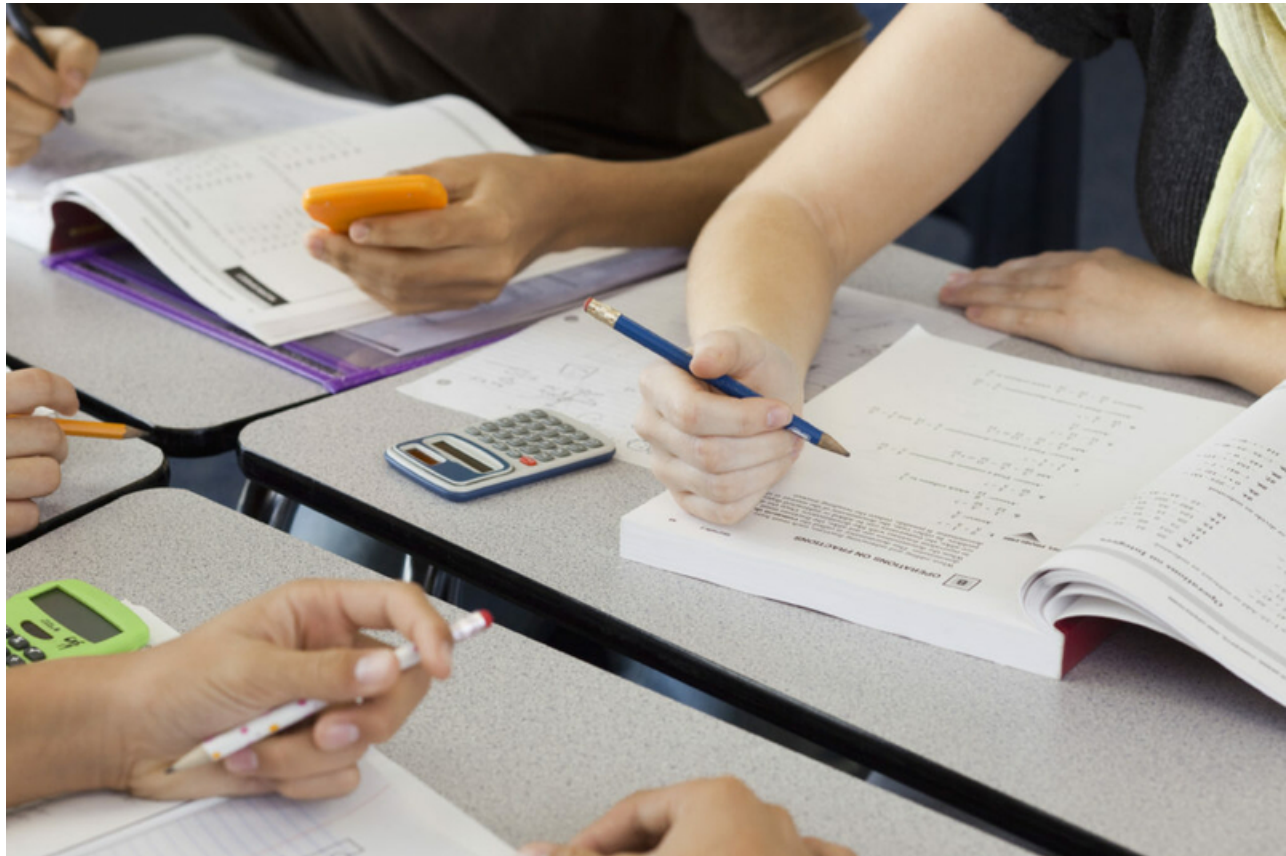


*DEAR LORD SHE'S PICKING A BOOK WITHOUT AN ADULT PRESENT  
(Photo by Getty Images)*

**Still, the challenges continue unabated.** From January through August, there were 695 attempts to censor library materials and services, up from 681 during the same time period last year, according to national data from the American Library Association. The number of “unique titles” challenged jumped to 1,915, a 20% increase from last year, which was, until now, the worst year on record for attempted censorship. Traditionally, those efforts target school libraries; this year, they’re divided almost evenly between school collections and public libraries, according to the ALA.

**The challenges have not risen organically — they’re part of a coordinated political effort** that aims for broad censorship by objecting to dozens of titles at once. Eleven states reported complaints about 100 or more books, up from six last year and none the year before. Some of the broadest objections are orchestrated by [right-wing groups like Moms For Liberty](#), a national organization with roughly 300 local chapters that “target local school board meetings, school board members, administrators and teachers” with calls for conservative policies.

**These so-called activists are not the majority**, but they’re everywhere and they’re loud — a potent combination that’s worked its magic on school districts across the country. In Oklahoma, for example, eight companies have withdrawn textbooks and curricula from consideration ahead of an expected vote on math materials by the state’s textbook committee. Eight vendors remain, including one (McGraw Hill) that’s already facing blowback from Moms For Liberty, [the](#)



*EGAD THEY'RE DOING MATH  
(Photo by Getty Images)*

**Experts said the publishers were likely deterred** by the state's polarized political climate, including an increasingly bitter fight over public school curriculum. And that's bad news for Oklahoma, a small-market state that already has limited leverage with the publishing industry, and worse news for its public schools, which could be left with far fewer textbooks that meet the required standard of review.

"In such a tiny market, it's already a huge investment for these publishers to revise and curate their curricula to match our needs," said Levi Patrick, executive director of the Tulsa Regional STEM Alliance. "We're so lucky that they do. I'm sure that they are feeling that they cannot both curate their curriculum for us to match our standards and also fight in politicized battles."

The chairperson of the textbook committee declined a request to comment and referred questions to the state Department of Education, where spokesman Dan Isett ignored a question about whether textbook companies gave reasons for withdrawing in favor of the following quote that likely explains those reasons:

"Unlike the previous administration, Superintendent Walters is committed to eliminating woke indoctrination in Oklahoma classrooms, including in textbooks," he said. "Consequently, the process is different now from in years past because it includes an extra layer of review."



*LOCAL CONTROL IS GREAT, IT MEANS THE STATE CONTROLS THINGS LOCALLY  
(Photo courtesy of Wyofile)*

**Officials in Wyoming will enact a similar “process” next month**, when the Department of Education is expected to release statewide library guidance to help school districts determine which reading materials are “appropriate,” [Wyofile reported](#). This isn’t an overreach thing, though, because Megan Degenfelder, the state’s superintendent, totally respects “local control in government, including authority of books.”

“However, through our research, we found that many districts do not have a robust system or policies in place for appropriate library materials,” Degenfelder [told](#) a U.S. House subcommittee last week. “They need support from the state level.”

“Support,” in this case, will be released Nov. 1 in the form of statewide guidance that includes sample definitions and model policy, all of it created in collaboration with parents, librarians, school officials and school board members of “varying backgrounds and viewpoints.” Degenfelder did not provide details about those backgrounds and viewpoints, but I suspect they are just slightly different shades of Republican red, based on her own background ([local control](#), but only at the state level!) and also her appearance at the congressional hearing, which focused on “combating graphic, explicit content in school libraries.”

“This issue of sexually explicit material in schools must be addressed so that we can return our focus to the fundamental purpose of education and regain trust in public education,” Degenfelder told the subcommittee.



*“OK.” — the St. Tammany Library Board of Control  
(Photo by Wes Muller/Louisiana Illuminator)*

**And now I will leave you with a confusing twist of optimism**, courtesy of the St. Tammany Library Board of Control in Louisiana, which voted 5-0 Monday to rescind a controversial policy that segregated more than 150 books pending review. The policy, adopted in December at the urging of a small-but-loud conservative group, had come under fire for potentially violating the First Amendment, [the Louisiana Illuminator reported](#).

Under the policy, library staff were required to remove from circulation challenged books until the board could complete a review of each complaint. But in 10 months, the board had worked through less than two dozen of the more than 150 challenged titles, most of them challenged due to LGBTQ+ content. The snail’s pace frustrated library patrons and prompted blowback from anti-censorship groups, including the ACLU of Louisiana, the [National Coalition Against Censorship](#) and the Tulane First Amendment Law Clinic, which claimed in a letter that the policy violated “the First Amendment’s Free Speech Clause and the Fourteenth Amendment’s Due Process Clause.”

“The Board’s policy has allowed a few residents to effectively censor what the rest of the Parish can access on library shelves, including award-winning works long cherished by readers,” wrote Katie Schwartzmann, the clinic’s director. “When done at the request of a handful of individuals (and primarily one), this is a

classic example of a ‘heckler’s veto’ repugnant to our nation’s laws.”

Board members agreed on Monday, voiding the policy in favor of a new framework that allows a panel of librarians and staff members to review challenges, with an appeals process for patrons who disagree with the decision. Sequestered books will be returned to the shelves within 30 days, with challenged materials remaining in circulation pending review.

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## State of Our Democracy

**Let’s head down to Fulton County Superior Court in Georgia,** where former Trump attorney Jenna Ellis on Tuesday pleaded guilty to making false statements about widespread voting fraud in the weeks after the 2020 election. Ellis was sentenced to five years probation and 100 hours of community service and was ordered to pay \$5,000 in restitution, [the Georgia Recorder reported](#).



*Jenna Ellis, not enjoying the judicial process from the defendant's side.  
(Photo by John Bazemore-Pool/Getty Images)*

Ellis is the fourth defendant to plead guilty in a sprawling election interference case that centers on the alleged conspiracy undertaken by Trump and his lackeys in hopes of overturning the 2020 election, in which (in case you haven't heard) Joe Biden was [elected president](#). The charges against Ellis stemmed from her appearance at a Dec. 3, 2020 Georgia Senate subcommittee hearing, in which she (and fellow attorneys Rudy Giuliani and Ray Smith) made a boatload of false but oddly specific statements, including allegations that nearly 100,000 fraudulent ballots had been included in Biden's vote tally and that 2,506 convicted felons and more than 66,000 underage Georgians had voted illegally.

Prosecutors framed those statements as part of a larger effort to convince Georgia legislators to declare Trump the winner of the state's electoral votes based on votes from a fraudulent slate of electors and, presumably, fever dreams masquerading as "evidence."

Ellis apologized for her actions, even as she sought to blame her willful participation on legal counsel from luminaries like Giuliani.

"I relied on others, including lawyers with many more years of experience than me, to provide me with true and reliable information, especially since my role involved speaking to the media and to legislators in various states," she said tearfully. "In the frenetic pace of attempting to raise challenges to the election in several states, including Georgia, I failed to do my due diligence. I believe in and I value election integrity. If I knew then what I know now, I would have declined to

represent Donald Trump in these post-election challenges.”

**All of this information was readily available then:** [Wiregrass officials see opportunities in new Alabama congressional district ...](#) [Trump files to appear on Colorado presidential ballot ...](#) [National Republican group spends \\$1.8 million on Liz Murrill’s Louisiana AG campaign ...](#) [Republican operatives sound every alarm on current trajectory of 2023 Mississippi governor’s race ...](#) [Final tally for first Nebraska border deployments totals nearly \\$1 million ...](#) [New Mexico lawmakers discuss how Native American Voting Rights Act is changing election processes ...](#) [New North Carolina election districts that lock in Republican advantages on their way to approval ...](#) [Tennessee city halts anti-LGBTQ ordinance for pride event ...](#) [U.S. Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee \(D-Texas\) expresses regret after audio leaks of her calling staffer a “fat-ass, stupid idiot”](#)



## From The Newsrooms

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- [Airtag stalking would become illegal under proposed Ohio bill](#)
- [Doctor suing FDA recruited to scientific advisory board to ‘repurpose’ abortion pill](#)
- [Northwest sinks millions into derelict vessel removal on region’s waterways](#)
- [Oregon AG sues Meta, alleging social media platforms harm children](#)



## One Last Thing

There is apparently a longstanding internet debate about whether a person should choose \$500,000 over having a meal with Jay-Z, which does not seem to me like a particularly difficult decision?

For what it’s worth, Jay-Z agrees. “You’ve gotta take the money,” he [told Gayle King](#). “You’ve got all that in the music for \$10.99. I wouldn’t tell you to cut a bad deal. Like, take the \$500,000, go buy some albums, and listen to the albums.”

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