

Bill restricting 'harmful' items from libraries is harmful

THE Indiana Censors, er, Senate, has spoken. Led by the Republican supermajority, they have taken bold action to confront our state's leading purveyor of materials harmful to children.

Librarians.

Many a child has been led down the primrose path by librarians. They scheme, tirelessly, to put knowledge in people's heads. Imagine the power this gives a librarian over a young, impressionable mind.

The librarian starts by giving a child a little taste of something like "The Lorax" by Dr. Seuss, or "The Giving Tree" by Shel Silverstein. Harmless, right?

Yet how many innocent youth have developed a lifelong habit this way? Before long, they're reading everything in sight, from "A Day in the Life of Marlon Bundo," about the pet rabbit kept by the family of former Vice President Mike Pence, to "Captain Underpants," about, well ... we assume by its very title that it must be dirty.

Early exposure leads to addiction, and naturally, kids crave the harder stuff. As they grow, they may get hooked on "To Kill a Mockingbird" by Harper Lee. Or "Slaughterhouse-Five" by Kurt Vonnegut. Or "The Fire Next Time" by James Baldwin. Even, heaven help us, "The Diary of Ann Frank."

Some consider these books violent, disgusting, even obscene. Something must be done!

Fortunately, heroic Indiana Supermajority Sen. Jim Tomes, R-Wadesville, has swooped in to save the day. His antidote to this reading madness is Senate Bill 17, which passed the Senate last week. As the Associated Press reported, the bill "would remove educational purposes as a reason that public schools and libraries could claim legal protection for sharing 'harmful material' with minors. That includes books and other materials deemed to be obscene, pornographic or violent."

As Tomes explained, the bill ensures that "repugnant" and "absolutely disgusting" materials would not be accessible to K-12 students. "These are not classic novels, renaissance pictures, excerpts from the Bible," Tomes said. "... It's about raw, nasty, filthy pornographic literature. Books."

Whew! That clears it up. As long as Tomes — or some other unspecified person or persons — says it's OK, you can read it, kids!

Tomes and the Indiana Senate are insulting the intelligence of their constituents to pretend they are anything but censors. And Tomes is disingenuous to suggest that classics, or even seemingly innocuous material, would be exempt. Why do we say that? Because every book title mentioned here has been banned from a public library or has been the target of a ban. Yes, even Marlon Bundo, may he rest in peace.

Vonnegut, the native Hoosier literary icon, saluted librarians in his final work, "A Man Without a Country." His dire critique of the nation he fought for in World War II noted that the America he still loved could be found at the front desk of a public library. Librarians, he wrote, "have staunchly resisted anti-democratic bullies who have tried to remove certain books from their shelves."

We know librarians will continue to resist anti-democratic bullies, and we support them. Librarians provide an invaluable service from which we all benefit, if we only ask them.

We shouldn't worry too much about kids taking out materials from their school or public library. We should worry, however, about anti-democratic bullies in the Indiana General Assembly taking them out permanently.

Send comments to editorial@therepublic.com.