

Questions for the Record from Senator Charles Grassley
U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary
“Book Bans: Examining How Censorship Limits Liberty and Literature”
September 12, 2023

Questions for Mr. Eden:

1. In your written testimony you reported that you found nearly three-quarters of the books labeled as “banned” by PEN were in fact still available in school libraries. Can you elaborate on this discrepancy and the harm to broader constructive dialogue as a result of misleading figures like this one?

The result is that the public has a massively inflated understanding of the scope of the problem. It also wrongly believes that school districts are limiting access to books on the basis of their stance on race. While it is true that parents have objected to books that they deem racist, school districts by and large are not agreeing to remove these books. If parents understood the true number and nature of books being removed, they would almost certainly be very sympathetic to the so-called “book bannings.”

2. What is the primary population pushing back against what many would consider to be reasonable age-appropriate restrictions? Why do school boards and other stakeholders insist on children having access to explicit material over parents’ reasonable concerns?

The pushback against age-appropriate restrictions comes from a triad of leftwing non-profits, Democratic partisans, and liberal media outlets. Each have their own reasons for doing this. It’s a great issue for non-profits to fundraise on. Poll suggest that voters oppose book bans (so long as they’re never actually informed of the contents of the books). And the media can indulge its narrative bias. All of this constructs a form of conventional wisdom that is taken as moral gospel by many education administrators, which lead school board members to believe that social justice requires school libraries stocked with pornographic material.