February 19, 2019

A STATEMENT REGARDING SENATE BILL 664
SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE HEARING, FEB. 20, 2019

Submitted by Paul Kopperman, Oregon State University

I wish to offer a statement in support of SB 664. My intention is to speak at the Senate hearing on the bill, but since my time will be restricted, I would like to take this opportunity to put my thoughts on the bill in writing, so that any interested individuals will be able to review them and if they feel so inclined, to ask me to elaborate.

First, let me thank Senator Wagner for introducing this bill, and to thank as well its many co-sponsors. I fervently hope that their efforts will be rewarded and that SB 664 will be passed overwhelmingly.

As various national polls have demonstrated, the preponderant majority of Americans consider it important for young people to learn about the Holocaust. Many thousands of teachers nationwide have worked the subject into their classes and have invited survivors to speak at their schools. A number of states east of the Mississippi require that the Holocaust be taught in school. Similarly, California has for some years mandated Holocaust education in the public schools, and recently several other western states – Alaska, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, and Washington -- have taken steps to require that school curricula broach the subject.

I have a deep interest in Holocaust education, although by and large my contributions have been at the university level. In 1982, four years after joining the history faculty at Oregon State, I introduced a course entitled “The Holocaust in Its History,” and while much revised and expanded it remains a primary offering of mine. Now designated as History 425/525, it is available online as well as onsite and has for twenty years been included in the OSU baccalaureate core. Despite requiring a heavy workload, both the onsite and the online versions invariably fill, not because of me, but because so many students are drawn to the subject.

In early 1987 I was invited to join the Holocaust Memorial Committee, which was then taking shape at OSU, and it has been my good fortune to be on the committee ever since, as well as chair since 1994. Through my association with the committee, I have had a hand in organizing all thirty-two editions of OSU Holocaust Memorial Week, an annual observance that deals with the Holocaust, other genocidal campaigns, and crimes against humanity. Although the observance at OSU is older and larger in scale

than many, there are thousands of events across the U.S. that coincide with it, all of them in keeping with “Days of Remembrance of Victims of the Holocaust,” the annual week-long observance that was designated by Congress in 1979.

Each successive Memorial Week at OSU includes talks by scholars and cultural offerings such as plays or concerts. But as in any program such as ours, the most anticipated event is the talk by a Holocaust survivor. It was during HMW in 2001 that I met Alter Wiener, who had only recently arrived in Oregon. To this day, I have never seen a speaker meld with his audience to the extent that Al did with his that evening. At the close of his talk, he invited members of the audience to come up to the stage to talk. Many, mostly students, joined him, and a majority were still listening to him an hour later, when his event finally came to an end because the lecture hall was closing. Besides Al, I have through the years had the privilege of meeting and working with dozens of survivors, each remarkable, each supremely dedicated to educating people, especially young people, about the Holocaust. Many survivors have spoken at OSU during HMW, always to large audiences (frequently 1000 or more), and character-istically young, often middle- or high-schoolers.

Sadly but inevitably, the numbers of survivors available to the schools or to programs like ours is in rapid decline, the result of both death and incapacitation. At the time Al moved to Portland, there were in the city still about a dozen individuals who had faced death during the war but had somehow survived to tell their story. Two years ago, four remained. Now there is no one who is alive and is well enough to speak in public. Al’s own death in December 2018 sealed a sad year that had also been marked by the death of the redoubtable Auschwitz survivor Miriam Greenstein. I hope that as they depart this life, these extraordinary men and women are confident that through their efforts, they have changed lives for the better, and our society for the better, since they have indeed done these things. But having spoken to many of them, I know that they hope to leave a legacy that goes beyond their personal interaction with audiences.

Now there is another way to make sure that the survivors’ message does not die with them: expanding Holocaust education. If enacted, SB 664 would seal the legacy of Al Weiner and the other dedicated men and women who worked for years to enlighten Oregonians about the Holocaust and its lessons.

The scope of k-12 Holocaust Education

During my time in Oregon, I have spoken on Holocaust-related topics in perhaps two dozen schools, from Vernonia to Paisley. I have tried to make these talks age appropriate, restricting reviews of the Holocaust proper to high-school venues while

concentrating on Anne Frank when I speak to younger children. Regardless, the level of interest that I have detected has been staggering. I remember particularly a talk that I gave at an elementary school in Lakeview, to a mixed group of fourth- and fifth-graders. I spoke about Anne and her family, and at the close I called for questions. In circumstances like this, youngsters are sometimes shy about asking questions of a stranger, so it is a teacher who needs to break the ice. On this occasion, however, the moment I encouraged questions many hands went up. For more than half an hour the children pressed me with questions that were meaningful and well thought out. When I had to leave, many of them ran to the door, to ask me final questions as I was departing. Almost certainly, the group had been prepared by teachers. In any case, this is how Holocaust education works best, with interested and involved children being assisted by teachers who have the knowledge and insight to guide their inquiry.

As they weigh the issue of mandating Holocaust education, however, Oregon senators may wish to consider how such a program can fit into school curricula that are already crowded. They may also consider what "Holocaust education" entails. In my opinion, an opinion that I am sure is shared by many others who teach about the Holocaust, the more narrowly defined the treatment is, the less valuable it is to students. I would suggest the following as standards for Holocaust education:

1) By the time a student graduates from high school, he or she should be aware that Antisemitism, which has been called "the longest hatred," had existed centuries before the Holocaust and had prompted persecution of and frequent violence against Jews. In my course at OSU I trace the prejudice far back into the Biblical period, but in a curriculum designed for schoolchildren, even high-schoolers, such broad coverage would be excessive. I believe, however, that the review should begin in 1850 or at least no later than 1900 – in other words, well before Hitler came to power in Germany – and should assess and explain the animosity toward Jews that was widespread in Europe and was, in this phase, becoming increasingly virulent. It would be unfortunate if students came away from their studies thinking that the Holocaust was the work of one man or even of one society, when in fact it was a Europe-wide phenomenon that had a number of precursors.
2) Holocaust education should also deal in depth with Nazi Germany in the pre-war years. Coverage should include: the barrage of propaganda that targeted the Jews and played on traditional negative stereotypes of them; Jews being stripped of their rights, banished from the schools, and dismissed from their jobs; random violence against Jews becoming national in the Crystal Night assault of November, 1938; increasingly in the late 1930's, Jews being sent to concentration camps; and Jews emigrating from Germany in large numbers,

though sometimes stymied by a difficulty in finding countries that would accept them.

3) Within the context of the Holocaust itself, students should of course learn of life and death in the ghettos and camps; the experiences of Jews in them; how they coped and how some – though a small minority – survived to liberation. Other topics associated with these years that should be examined include: the perpetrators of the Final Solution (the organizers; the managers; the hands-on killers) – what motivated them to destroy?; those few who tried to assist the Jews – what characteristics did they share?; the many who did not help the Jews but did not assist in their destruction, a group often called bystanders – were they "innocent" bystanders?; the role that non-Germans played in the Final solution; Allied (mainly U.S., U.K.) efforts to assist the Jews and why they are widely considered to have been too little, too late; Jewish armed resistance during the Holocaust; other forms of Jewish "resistance."
4) Students should learn of major developments since 1945, particularly in Europe and the U.S., that were prompted by awareness of the Holocaust. These include: a steep decline in Antisemitism in the U.S., especially from the 1930's to the 1960's, as evidenced in public opinion polls; the spread of Holocaust education in the U.S. and Europe, particularly after 1980; the condemnation of Antisemitism by Christian churches, followed by rethinking of church doctrine and teachings about the Jews and a growing emphasis on Jewish-Christian dialog; Germany's actions to combat Antisemitism, notably through reeducation of youth; beginning at the Nuremberg trials, the expansion of international law and judicial institutions to confront genocide and crimes against humanity; a growing willingness in many societies to accept diversity, coupled with intolerance for intolerance [note: in several cases, these tendencies have ebbed and flowed; students should be encouraged to consider why].
5) Besides learning about the Holocaust, during the course of their education students should become aware of other genocides and large-scale assaults on civilian populations (crimes against humanity). The 20th century saw many genocidal campaigns, e.g. the Armenian Genocide, the Cambodian Genocide, and the Rwandan Genocide. The Holocaust coincided with the mass killing of Roma, and the Nazis were responsible for the "euthanasia" program, which targeted individuals who were regarded as mentally or physically "defective," as well as the persecution of homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and various national groups. A danger in restricting Holocaust education to the Holocaust itself is that students may imagine that genocide was a one-time event and that they need not be concerned by the issue.

In suggesting these learning goals, I am not implying that they should all be examined in a single course, nor on a single level. Schools and teachers should decide which topics are appropriate to broach for different age groups, as well as how to present them. But beyond the structure of a Holocaust curriculum, there remains the question of its purpose.

How may studying the Holocaust benefit schoolchildren and American society?

1) One answer commonly given is that it will reduce Antisemitism – this, at a time when incidents targeting Jews are rising sharply in the United States. I, too, believe that expanding Holocaust education in the schools would help to counter Antisemitism in American society. Let me add, however, that it would encourage acceptance of diversity in general. An awareness of the Holocaust, especially if one is also aware of the background to it – a tradition of virulent stereotyping of Jews, ramped up through Nazi propaganda – represents a potent case in point of the dangers of accepting stereotypes, particularly those that cast groups in a strongly negative light.
2) Obviously, Holocaust education in the schools can serve to sensitize students to the problem of genocide in the modern world, and if they are also taught about other genocidal campaigns, this only magnifies the value of the lesson. Genocide and large-scale crimes against humanity remain common, even if few of them approach the lethality of the Holocaust. Perhaps the rising generation, if it is made aware of the problem, will be more innovative in seeking ways to resolve it than previous ones have been.
3) Relating to the last point, while world opinion consistently and overwhelmingly condemns genocides that have concluded, little is done to counter them while they are under way. Although the Holocaust can be cited here, an even better example is the Rwandan Genocide. After he left office, Bill Clinton, who had been president during that genocide, famously apologized for not having done more to bring the killing to an end. But aside from a few token efforts, the U.N. and Europe also failed to intervene while the genocide was ongoing. The killing campaign was poorly coordinated, and even a small-scale military commitment on the part of the West would probably have brought this genocide to a close quickly. Should the West have intervened in this case? More generally, what, if anything, should third-party nations do in order to quell ongoing genocides? The problems may be complex, but these are the sort of real-world issues that students should grapple with.
4) Most major 20th-century genocides, as well as many lesser ones, were managed by absolutist governments that espoused extremist and sometimes revolutionary ideologies. We can of course think of Hitler and the Holocaust,

but an equally good example is the Cambodian Genocide, which grew from the radical, uncompromising vision of Pol Pot. The link between extremist ideologies and genocide is one that should be studied in the context of Holocaust education. Students who ponder it may be encouraged to reject political extremism.

5) Just as students may refrain from embracing extremist ideologies, so may studying the Holocaust and other genocides discourage them from simply following the herd. That herd may hate. It may also be captivated by a charismatic leader who holds dangerous views. The hands-on killers in genocides often have a strong herd instinct. Young people with a meaningful awareness of the Holocaust may be more prone to value the principle of thinking for themselves.
6) While it is true that studying the Holocaust confronts us with much that is depressing and perhaps frightening, one can find elements that are positive, even inspirational and empowering. An examination of the rescuers of Jews – "The Righteous among the Nations," as they are sometimes called – can encourage people to reflect on the best of humanity. By choosing to assist Jews, these individuals assumed a great risk, and many of them paid with their lives for it. One of these was Raoul Wallenberg. He was a member of a wealthy Swedish family. Sweden was neutral during World War II, and Wallenberg could easily have lived out the war at home, in comfort. Instead, under the guise of serving as a diplomat, he undertook a mission to rescue the Jews of Hungary, and he carried it through so well that he is often credited with having saved 70,000 Jews (some sources place the figure at 100,000). He was not, however, able to save himself, being taken prisoner by the Red army when it "liberated" Budapest, and subsequently dying – probably being executed – in a Soviet prison camp. Another rescuer, whose story has become widely known only in the past few years, was Roddie Edmonds, who was from Tennessee. He was master sergeant of an American infantry regiment that was captured by the Germans during the Battle of the Bulge and was sent to a stalag. Shortly after it arrived, the commandant told Edmonds to order that on the following morning Jews in his regiment were to gather separately from the other men. The implication was clear: These Jewish soldiers – there were about 200 in the regiment – would be sent on to concentration camps, where some would die. This was in fact the fate of a number of Jewish POW's late in the war. Edmonds, however, ordered that all of his men assemble together. The commandant demanded that Edmonds order Jews to separate themselves from the other soldiers, but Edmonds, a committed Baptist, responded, "We are all Jews here." Enraged, the commandant held a gun to Edmonds's head and insisted that he give the

order, but the sergeant again replied, “We are all Jews here,” and told the German officer that if he killed any prisoner he would one day be tried as a war criminal. At this point, the commandant backed down. After returning to the U.S. at the close of the war, Edmonds never spoke of this incident, and it was only after he died that his son learned of it by reading a diary that he had kept while at the stalag. The son then campaigned to have his father’s heroism recognized, and in consequence Roddie Edmonds has received many posthumous honors, including a Congressional Gold Medal.

While the “Righteous” of the Holocaust years were few compared to the perpetrators and the bystanders, their stories can inspire young people, and recounting them should certainly be included in Holocaust education. Furthermore, while not the case with accounts of grimmer aspects of the Holocaust, many stories of rescue are suitable to tell even to children in elementary school.

7) Just as stories of the rescuers can inspire children, so can the examination of positive developments that occurred in the years after the Holocaust and have continued, even gained momentum, down to the present. For example, let me again note the transformation that has taken place in Germany. While Germany’s central role in unleashing the Holocaust is obvious, it should be added that no nation has done more to atone for a genocide. Far from attempting to minimize or excuse Germany’s part, political leaders acknowledge and condemn it. Across the country, there are thousands of memorials to the victims. Perhaps most important, since about 1980 there has been an intensive national commitment to Holocaust education. The end result of these developments has been a steep decline in Antisemitism. A survey by the ADL in 2015 found that 18% of Germans who were interviewed accepted a majority of common negative stereotypes of Jews, this figure being higher than in some countries, including the U.S., but significantly lower than the norm in Europe. The Jewish community in Germany, which was just a remnant in 1945, has grown markedly, and in general feels welcome and secure. The German example demonstrates that social attitudes can change and that education can be effective in combating prejudice. Learning of it, and of other developments since 1945 that I enumerated earlier, can be empowering for schoolchildren, because they can draw the lesson that positive change is possible and that they can help to make it happen.

Requirements of teacher education

Holocaust education in Oregon will be most beneficial if the teachers are well prepared. Acquiring the level of knowledge necessary is not difficult. For college-age men and women who aspire to teach k-12, or for licensed teachers who return to do

graduate work, courses on the Holocaust are available at a number of colleges and universities in Oregon. Furthermore, for individuals in both of these categories and for established teachers who may wish to teach the Holocaust, resources and curricular guides are readily accessible. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is particularly well geared to supporting Holocaust education, providing, among other things: workshops and seminars for teachers; books and documentaries on the Holocaust and other genocides; and curricular guides and lesson plans. Various states that are invested in Holocaust education (New Jersey and Kentucky, for example) also publish curricular guides. Many institutions and organizations, such as the Anti-Defamation League and the Museum of Tolerance, likewise offer broad-based assistance to teachers. The list is very long and the opportunities for teachers to get ideas, guidance, and resources are virtually endless. If the range of opportunities is intimidating, however, the USHMM website is probably the best place to go.

Teachers who wish for materials that will make the Holocaust more immediate to their classes may draw on a wealth of literature intended for children, even those quite young. One famous example of this genre is *Number the Stars*, an award-winning novel by Lois Lowry, which deals with the friendship of two young Danish girls, one Jewish, the other Christian, and with the successful evacuation of the Jews of Denmark in the fall of 1943. It is one of those rare Holocaust novels that has a happy ending, and it is well suited to readers between the fourth and the seventh grades. Besides fiction directed to young readers, there are many diaries available (Anne Frank's retains its classic status). Furthermore, a number of films, some animated, are directed toward schoolchildren.

Holocaust education provides teachers with a golden opportunity to be creative. I would note the project that is at the center of a well-known documentary, *Paper Clips*, which was produced in 2004. The story begins when administrators of a high school in rural Tennessee, noting that their students are almost all white, wonder how as adults they will cope with the wider world and its diversity. In an effort to sensitize students to the problem of intolerance, the principal approves a plan to teach a course on the Holocaust. One day, a student in the class complains that she cannot comprehend the idea of "six million," prompting the school to launch a project to collect six million paper clips. The teachers encourage their students to write letters requesting clips, and soon network news broadcasts begin to publicize the appeal. Celebrities and political leaders contribute paper clips, plus letters of encouragement (the actor Tom Bosley, who had lost family in the Holocaust, reads his). Holocaust survivors travel many miles to speak at the school. Eventually, more than 25 million paper clips are donated. So is a cattle car from Germany, which during the war the war had been used to transport Jews to the camps. Under the direction of their teachers, students refit the cattle car, filling it with a

display on the Holocaust. Here, then, we have the record of what grew from an innovative initiative. Beyond this, *Paper Clips*, which is readily accessible, beautifully illustrates the transformative potential of Holocaust education.

I apologize for the length of this statement, but the topics addressed are important and merit extended discussion. As I said at the outset, I hope that when SB 664 is put to a vote it will not only pass, but will pass overwhelmingly, with strong bipartisan support. The schoolchildren of Oregon deserve no less.

Sincerely,

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