



Trustees of Pierce College Forced to End Its “Free Speech Zone” Directive

Trustees of Pierce College, a community college serving Los Angeles, [agreed last Friday](#) to open its campus to freedom of speech, reversing its previous commands that such “free speech” would only be allowed in a tiny part of the school’s enormous campus.



The decision affects not only Pierce College, but also eight other community colleges in the area, the largest community college district in the country with more than 150,000 students.

And all because a single student, informed of his rights, decided not to back down. Kevin Shaw, a freshman at Pierce, joined Young Americans for Liberty (YAL), the group that morphed from Ron Paul’s unsuccessful presidential campaign in 2008. In the fall of 2016 Shaw started passing out copies of the U.S. Constitution on one of the campus sidewalks to interest others in joining the local YAL campus chapter.

Within an hour the administration shut him down, telling him that he needed official permission to do so, and once granted, he would be confined to an area of 616 square feet (out of the campus’ 426 acres) located away from the center of the campus.

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) learned of the incident and offered Shaw their help. FIRE is a foundation founded in 1969 by a libertarian professor at the University of Pennsylvania, Alan Kors, to provide support for students like Shaw who felt their rights guaranteed by the First Amendment had been violated.

A lawsuit was filed and two years later the Los Angeles Community College District capitulated. As FIRE’s director of litigation Marieke Tuthill Beck-Coon explained:

More than two years ago, administrators wrongly told Kevin he was not allowed to hand out copies of the U.S. Constitution in the center of his public college campus. He’s been standing up for his First Amendment rights every day since, and in the process has vindicated the rights of every student in the district....

Shaw was also told that he must fill out a permit application to use the free speech zone — requiring him to get a permission slip to exercise his First Amendment rights. He was informed that he would be asked to leave his own campus if he refused to comply.

The ruling forced the district not only to reverse its “free speech zone” policies on all nine campuses but to pay Shaw’s legal fees of \$225,000 as well.

Shaw said that the education he got through the two-year process “was not without its difficulties” but has left him “optimistic about the guiding principles of my country.”



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It also has left open many questions. Why did the district allow the lawsuit to proceed, costing Los Angeles taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees and court costs when they knew they couldn't win it? Did they not know they were violating students' rights through its demands that free speech could only be exercised on a tiny part of the campus? What kind of speech was being allowed or required on the rest of the sprawling campuses? Isn't, or shouldn't, the entire campus be open to free speech? Isn't that part of what education is about?

Other rulings obtained by FIRE in quashing similar "free speech zones" (about one in every 10 public universities have such limits on free speech) should have informed these public officials that their case had no basis.

Perhaps the ruling and the capitulation that followed informs those in the freedom fight just how imbedded the tyranny of political correctness is. If this district rules that "free speech zones" may only be allowed on certain tiny parts of their campus, how many other tyrants are issuing such edicts elsewhere across the country?

Isn't, or shouldn't, the entire United States be considered a "free speech zone" protected by the First Amendment ("Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.")?

For those involved in the freedom fight, like members of the John Birch Society, the ruling should bring joy that they are not acting alone. FIRE has won dozens of similar First Amendment cases, while YAL has much in common with the society in the freedom cause. Its members support the Constitution in its original intent, have protested the war in Iraq and the TSA's violations of personal rights; and they have sought to pressure Congress to reduce the national debt. YAL hosts national conventions attended by hundreds of students who hear uplifting and encouraging comments from Ron Paul and his son, Rand, along with Representative Justin Amash (R-Mich.), who has a 94-percent [Freedom Index](#) rating from the John Birch Society's *The New American* magazine, and Judge Andrew Napolitano, among others.

What's missing from the mission of the YAL is the unique position of [The John Birch Society](#) that the threats facing the republic are not self-inflicted but are the result of a decades-long conspiracy. Robert Welch, the founder of the society, called the cabal "Insiders" while the current president and others refer to it as the "Deep State."

Fighting symptoms of that threat like "free speech zones" on campus and protesting foreign wars are important, and victories are cheering. But these are surface issues that mask the deeper threat of powers that, through general public ignorance, threaten the very existence of the republic. That explains why, as Society President Emeritus John McManus explained in his just published [The John Birch Society: Its History Recounted By Someone Who Was There](#), the society has always been considered an existential threat to that conspiracy through its educational and action programs and projects, and has always "fought above its fighting weight" (as McManus expressed it) in the freedom fight.

It is hoped that, now that Kevin Shaw has won his victory over PC tyrants running the Pierce College campus, he might consider a larger and vastly more important fight and join The John Birch Society. If one individual can do what he has accomplished, just think what can be accomplished if he joins an army of others like him!

Photo: NickS/E+/Getty Images



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