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In A Deep-Red Florida County, This Gay Teacher Quit To Save Her Career

“You cannot teach kids to be gay or straight,” Alyssa Marano said. “I just want my kids to be able to solve for X.”

By **Nathalie Baptiste**

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Weeks after stepping down from her job as a high school math teacher, Alyssa Marano arrived at a contentious school board meeting in Hernando County, Florida.

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Sometimes they just are gay. I have math to teach. I literally don't have time to teach your kids to be gay."

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"This gay teacher, who accepts her students exactly as they are, outscored the county by 15% in geometry and outscored the state by 10%," she added. "And now a sub will take my spot in my cold, bare classroom."

Hundreds of people had shown up for the meeting, largely due to an ongoing controversy over a fifth-grade teacher who had [shown her students a Disney movie](#) that included a gay character. Armed law enforcement officers were present. The public comment portion of the evening stretched on for hours. Many parents, teachers and students stood up and [defended educators](#), but there were still plenty of other speakers who [complained about "wokeness"](#) in schools.

For Marano, the frenzy over culture wars instead of focusing on education and students was the nail in the coffin.

"There's been a fire in me for a year now," Marano told HuffPost. "I love teaching, I love my students and I love my colleagues, but I know they're on a witch hunt."

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And Marano felt like she had a target on her back.

"I'm accepting of people for who they are," she said. "I believe all students deserve access to education and resources. And I'm gay."

I'm willing to leave it right now in hopes of it becoming better in the future.”

- Alyssa Marano, high school math teacher

Resigning after more than eight years of teaching was partly a method of self-preservation, since she hopes to work in a classroom in the future. Marano was worried about getting fired for violating Florida's so-called “Don't Say Gay” law, which limits what teachers can say about gender identity and sexual orientation in the classroom and [allows for a teacher's license to be revoked](#) if they break the law.

“I believe so much in education that I'm willing to leave it right now in hopes of it becoming better in the future,” she said.

She is far from the only educator leaving her post in the district, which has about [24,000 students and 3,100 staff members](#). [Thirty-three](#) teachers are resigning and 15 more are retiring, a Hernando County Public Schools spokesperson told HuffPost. Jenna Barbee, the teacher who showed her class “Strange World,” a movie about climate change that has a gay character, has also recently resigned.

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Under the guise of “parental rights,” elected officials and talking heads across the U.S. have worked to restrict what teachers can tell students about gender, sexuality and race. Meanwhile, school boards have banned books by claiming that materials with LGBTQ+ or racial justice themes indoctrinate children.

This is especially true in Florida, which, under Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis — who has announced a 2024 White House bid and is holding up the state's policies as an example of what he'd do as president — has become ground zero for enacting and enforcing strict educational policies. Hernando County is a deep-red pocket of the state approximately 50 miles north of Tampa, where [Donald Trump](#) and DeSantis [dominated their most recent races by large margins](#).

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after they saw how quickly the Florida Department of Education began investigating Barbee. [Shannon Rodriguez](#), a parent in the district and a member of the school board who is backed by the ultraconservative group Moms 4 Liberty, reported Barbee to the department after she learned about students seeing the movie last month.

Marano said she's worried that small gestures, like displaying a Pride flag, and teachers talking to students about their lives outside of school could be grounds for disciplinary action under the Don't Say Gay law.

"Providing students with a rainbow flag doesn't mean you're teaching kids to be gay," Marano said. "The American flag has been used as a tool for the GOP, and I have that up in my classroom. Am I a Republican now?"

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"I'm in the happiest and healthiest relationship I've been in, better than when I was closeted and dating men, and I can't share that," she added.

It's a lot for teachers to have to worry about, in addition to educating their students.

"You cannot teach kids to be gay or straight," Marano said. "I just want my kids to be able to solve for X."

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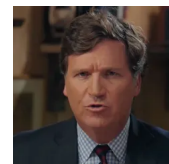
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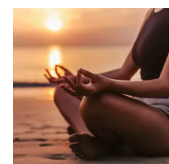
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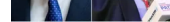
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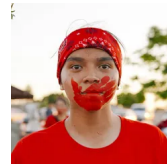


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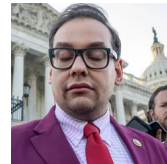
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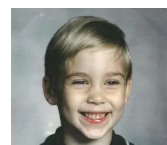
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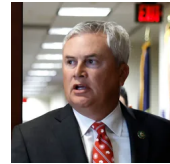
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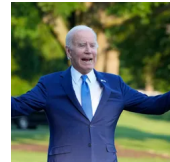
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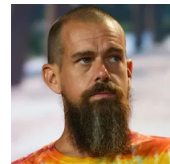
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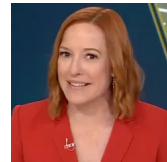
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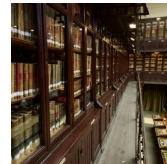
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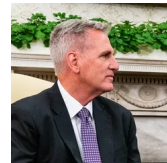
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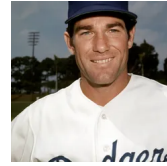
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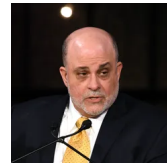
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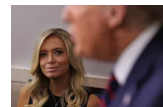
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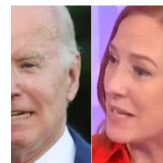
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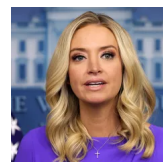
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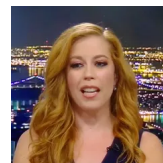
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