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SPEAKERS

Piper, Josh, Guest

- J** Josh 00:02
Friends and neighbors, you're listening to Portland from the left, my name is Josh and I use he and him pronouns.
- P** Piper 00:07
My name is Piper and I use she and her pronouns. So
- G** Guest 00:11
I'm -- and I use she they pronouns. And I'm here to talk about school boards.
- J** Josh 00:16
Why would we bring you specifically on to talk about school boards? Have you been like, very like interested in school boards lately?
- G** Guest 00:22
Yeah, I would say I have been. I am a parent in the Portland metro area, and have never really been that interested in them. Because my kids are younger. And it just felt like, Oh, that's not that important. And I'm busy. And then I started seeing how much stuff was happening with local school boards and the types of people who were occupying time and then listening to some of the local school board members being like, Please, can you fill up this time and take it away from people who aren't even in our district, and come and talk about relevant things to

us, please, and started really paying a lot of attention to what was happening and realizing like, not only just here, but nationwide, it's become a really significant topic on the kind of political scene. And it's not new either. It's just kind of a resurgence of the tactic.

P

Piper 01:17

What kind of people are taking up time at the school board meetings?

G

Guest 01:22

Man, okay, so I've been watching keeping eyes on places like Salem, North Clackamas, and Portland and Gresham. And there's been a lot of common themes, we're talking about, like anti CRT training, which like CRT is not even taught in grade school, or high school, anti masking, anti vaccine mandate and anti like quarantine or any sort of COVID regulations, anti teachings about anything to do with LGBTQIA. So like, it could be like, we don't want to talk about gender, we don't want to talk about queer stuff. We don't want to talk about anything to do with that. And so anti critical race, anti. Yeah, I think those are the main topics that I can think of right off the top of my head. And they're just repeated over and over. And they're, sometimes they sound smart at first, and then you're like, where are you going with this? And they'll be like, Oh, that's where you're going with it? No, we're not doing that.

J

Josh 02:21

My experience with the local groups who are doing the kind of like re-open schools, you know, COVID doesn't affect children, you need to take the masks off children because of their mental health, this kind of stuff. All of those patterns, they seem like they're, they're very, very similar to some of the more like a fascist, and far right patterns of like, talking in circles and using some of the same words to describe some of the same ideas. But then twisting it enough to use it in a way that's like harmful or damaging in some way, like, like you're talking about lots of the talking points are disparate, so there's like anti Vax and anti masking, which is one thing, and then there's a lot of anti trans stuff and anti queer stuff more broadly. And they're kind of all attached to parts of a thing. And like a growing coalition or, you know, some some sort of gathering of people. And it's it's hard to describe beyond just like anti progressive or anti, anti good stuff. I don't even.

P

Piper 03:25

Yeah, let's take a step back. How like, how our school boards structured, like, what decisions are made there? How do people get into power in a school board,

G

Guest 03:35

obviously, there has to be an opening on your school board. But you can also do recalls on school board members, which is also a big push from people on the far right, is to get some of the school board members out that they don't like. But basically, you just need to be in the

district, and you can fill out an application and run for the school board. But it's honestly it seems like it's also a place where a lot of people are using to jump off into bigger politics. So they're using it as a launching pad. Because it's not really that hard. There's like a \$10 filing fee to get on for the school board. And because not very many people take or like not a huge amount of people will take school board elections very seriously or look into the candidates and like all of the stuff that's going on with them. They can skate by a lot of times with some really kind of wacky, wacky politics and wacky things that they have belief-wise,

P Piper 04:29

and and what kinds of things do school boards decide about schools? Like what are some decisions, maybe just examples of things that have happened recently?

G Guest 04:37

Yeah, well, I'm so down in Salem, the one of the youth groups that has been petitioning the school board and stuff and working with a school board got SROs out of their school last year. That's something that comes down to school board level decision making.

J Josh 04:54

And that's the name for Student Resource Officers. The cops in schools, right?

G Guest 04:57

Yes, yes.

P Piper 04:58

That's awesome.

G Guest 04:59

A lot. times the things that are being decided are curriculum that people want to see a lot of new things that are not necessarily new, but a lot of schools are adopting. Land acknowledgments now. They're basically like, I'm almost working backwards, because I've heard so much testimony and stuff from people at the school boards, and I'm like, Oh, they do that. So like, one of the problems that came up, was a teacher was brought up before the school board that she, in her I think ESL classes, or she's a language teachers, she's working with a lot of latinÃ© kids and people who are speaking Spanish first. And they were getting their textbooks, like three years after the English speaking students were getting their version of the textbooks.

J Josh 05:49
That seems problematic.

G Guest 05:50
Yeah, right. Like, that's a big deal. School boards, do textbook approvals. They approve curriculum materials, they're setting the spending priorities. So when Salem youth got their Student Resource Officers taken out, then there was the question, okay, what do we do with as part of the budget, and so they were petitioning the the school to prioritize that money towards minority mental health. And they're also working with a lot of the teachers and the leaders on school schedules, they're making the decision on COVID safety protocols. Their job is basically like also hearing from the community on what they should be focusing on and implementing. And so it's really important to go and talk like, first of all electing really good ones who have like, super far right beliefs and don't have these really problematic backgrounds or ties with like three percenters, like in Salem. And then also like going and speaking to them and paying attention to what they're doing, because they have a lot of power and control on what is happening in the school.

J Josh 06:55
Yeah, exactly. It's a lot like the city council conversations that we're having where, you know, these people can be in rooms, with very few other people, and not only to people listening to them, or paying attention to them making decisions for 1000s of 1000s of students and families.

G Guest 07:11
One of the things that is important, I guess, about the way that school board meetings work, and it probably has overlap with city, because both government officials and government employees, and that that is like you can't mention specific employees, they have a problem with a particular one, it's kind of messed up that they can't talk about it also. And because a lot of times the only power they have is is like going up the level and up the chain. And they get ignored a lot. And so they go to like their last ditch effort. And then they can't name names at that point, either. And it's it's tough. I think for them, I see a lot of frustration there.

P Piper 07:49
Whoa, I didn't realize that was a restriction.

G Guest 07:52
Yeah. And like in Salem, in particular, they got shut down a bunch of times with the school board being like, you can't say their name. We can't talk about that. And it was interesting, because there would be like, Okay, I won't say the name. And they would start describing a

situation and they'd be like, That's too specific. You can't talk about it. And it was like, wow, this person who works for the school literally said that they almost body slammed a 15 year olds, Hispanic, to quote the post, a public Facebook posts where they said they almost violently took down a 15 year old Hispanic child. And and like, you can't talk about that at the school board meeting. Are you kidding? Like, no, that's specific, and they didn't even name his name.

J Josh 08:36

That's not too dissimilar from what we hear from Mayor Wheeler, when he talks about the he usually calls them not staffing, not employment issues, but Oh, Human Resources issues. So like, whenever, like, you do exactly what I was talking about. So yeah, whenever there's a specific problem with a specific cop, and people know his name, or their names out there, frequently tegular will get asked questions from journalists asking about the specific situation. And he'll just say, Well, I can't really talk to it because it's a human resources issue. And I wouldn't want to violate the union contract. You know, I don't want to do anything bad there. And I know specifically, with the cops in the city, I relate everything to the cops. All I know is cops like just cop stuff. But I do know that the Portland Police association's contract. And actually, I think this wasn't the most recent one, but the one before it. There was a stipulation that said that you couldn't overly embarrass police with their discipline. Yeah, even when you could say their name once they had been convicted of something if you embarrass them too much. Like you couldn't do that. So

G Guest 09:47

big problem, because you know, SROs are in schools too. So you have that whole overlap between you know what the cops are, their contracts by themselves, which I mean, and unions are good except when we're talking about things like cops, and sometimes city officials or whatever, when they're put in a position where you can't hold them accountable, accountable because of their union contracts. Like that's, that's not really the point of that. I don't think

J Josh 10:13

I think that's the big thing there that the collective bargaining isn't. It's absolutely beneficial and helpful for workers to have a way to gather together and, you know, build support for themselves and some self determination. But yeah, like you're saying, when it gets in the way of, well, getting things done, really, I mean, that really the school board like City Council, you're just using it as a way to obscure the relationships of power that are going on and who's responsible for what, so that they can kick the can down the road, because they know, eventually the kid will give up. Like, that's just true. It's true. I mean, victims know this, right now, you only have so much gas in the tank to keep fighting something to keep trying to get your story heard. So if you hear you know, for a year, every time you come up, oh, we can't talk about the name, we can't say their name. And there's these rules about the union. And oh, they're very obscure, you wouldn't understand it's the same stuff that we hear every other situation, every other room where people don't, or there's a power imbalance, right, where there's people with a lot of power, and people with a little bit of power, the people with a lot of power, they use all of the infrastructure, all of the rules, and all of the kind of politeness of society to try to prevent people without power to speak for themselves and have some self

determination in this case for students to even try to get, you know, grievances addressed with with teachers and faculty. And it's, it's unfair, I think, probably, it's definitely unfair to compare educators to cops, of course, teachers aren't cops. But in this case, when big, big places of power, like unions and union contracts, get in the way of people that are marginalized and oppressed from getting some justice, I think that's a problem. So like, you know, I won't have wanted to say a long sentence that said, you know, of course, teachers aren't cops, please, my partner is a teacher, leave me alone. But also, I think that unions, of course, are good workers need to fight for self determination and need collective power to do that in a capitalist society. But also, I think there's a lot of times where these contracts, you know, they don't do the best thing for the rest of us.

P Piper 12:26

Yeah. Especially in cases where there, there is a less empowered group being affected. Exactly. So not just bosses here, we're talking about students, of course, don't have a lot of power.

J Josh 12:38

Well, yeah. And you've got the teachers union, which has kind of a lot of power, or relatively speaking, right? It's still just the unions are still just workers, but they do have relatively significant power in the areas they're in. But the students frequently don't have a union. I mean, what do you sometimes have like a PTSA, or something where maybe they can speak up, maybe they can go to school board meetings, but really, I mean, the school board meetings aren't made for students, as much as as much as the school might make a big deal when students come in to talk and stuff that's not really for them, right? They're just kind of letting them show up. It's very patronizing in that way, right. Yeah,

G Guest 13:12

for sure. And that is something that's really important too, with these school boards is and the meetings is they're often full of parents. And some of them are adamant about these talking points. And we're not hearing from the actual students and how they actually feel about those things. And I think that's a big missing piece for our society in general. And then also what's happening with the school boards is the students are not being centered, the students are not being listened to. And they're the ones with this firsthand experience. And they're the ones without power, you know, and city hall and city government, we have citizens and whom, you know, a lot of times are adults, which they have a certain amount of their own power and agency, when you actually listen to some of these school board meetings, like I had goosebumps, like, probably every school board meeting that a student speaks at. Because you listen to them. And it's like, Holy fuck, you guys know what you're talking about. You have passion and drive and you're paying attention and you know what you want, and you know what you need. And it's really cool to listen to them starting to rise up or not necessarily starting. I'm sure lots of kids have been doing this for a while, but actually starting to listen to them is really fucking cool.

P Piper 14:23

I'm really glad that I'm hearing you talk about some good things happening at school boards because prior to this conversation, I was pretty much like ready to hear like really scary, doom shit because of the news about school boards in the area. But like, I love hearing, like, you know, working to get the student resource officers out of schools and Salem, like that's rad. And students speaking up for themselves at the school board meetings is really cool. So I'm, I'm glad, like, is there anything else really cool, like on the good side that you've heard happening?

G

Guest 14:54

Good and Bad, bad, right. So Gresham just had a school board meeting. And there was A new group of students, the students against oppression that just formed because their student resource officer has apparently been doing some pretty bad shit. And for a while and like has been in the news before, because he tackled a 17 year old Black student. And I was trying to piece together the story and basically like the, the woman got or not woman, she was a girl. She got suspended and was like needing to leave campus, but she had to go pick up her daughter. And so like there is a confusion on whether or not she was still allowed to be there in school schools like, yeah, you're allowed to be here so you can get your daughter so you can go, and the school resource officer was like, No, you're trespassing. And it was really messed up. But they tackled her to the ground. And that was in 2019. And he's still there in Gresham, at that school as a student resource officer. But there's been a lot of like more recent stuff, and the students had a press release. Yeah, a press release before the school board meeting, because it's been virtual. And I guess they weren't really going to get a chance to speak. And so they really wanted to make sure that their statements got spoken out loud and heard, rather than because what a lot of times school boards will like, take the written stuff, and they'll just compile it. And they'll be like, some people talked about this. And some people talked about that, really generally sum up what the public comments were, if they're not spoken to the board. So they had this press release, and we're talking about that. And it was super powerful, they had some really important things to say, like listening to them talk about how they're going to advocate for each other, and how they're gonna stand up when the adults won't. And even in the face of like a bunch of teachers that are too afraid to back them up. And the students who want to come forward but are afraid to to like, publicly commit to being a part of that group. And then this they got on Twitter and stuff, which was cool. And then there's other people in the community, they're like, hey, you need to hook up with the students that are in Salem, who got rid of their SROs last year. And so these two groups hopefully are going to start linking up so Gresham and Salem to start working together. And that would be youth working together. One group who just got rid of their SROs and the other group that's trying to and so I'm excited to see what happens there and hopefully they'll be able to work together towards that goal.

P

Piper 17:19

I love that.

G

Guest 17:21

It seems like for every parental or adult group that comes up to attack school boards or to like focus on school boards, there's always a group of youth that are rising up within their schools to speak

focus on school boards, there's groups of youth that are rising up within their schools to speak back and push back and to take action against that. So I think that is one of the things that's really cool and definitely fills me up with like hope for humanity and hope for like the situation that we have going on right now.