

“2A Defenders Please Stand Up,” by Dr. Chris Jones

In a troubling turn of events, Arkansas' proposed Senate Bill 246 (SB246) bill represents a blatant assault on our First Amendment rights. The bill seeks to suppress student civic engagement by prohibiting excused absences for political protests, social advocacy, and legislative engagement. This isn't just an attack on students—it's an attack on the very freedoms that define our democracy.

The First Amendment guarantees the right to free speech, peaceful assembly, and petitioning the government for redress of grievances. SB246 directly undermines these rights, particularly for young people who have historically played a vital role in advancing social change. From the Little Rock Nine to the March for Our Lives, student activism has been a catalyst for progress. SB246 seeks to penalize this engagement, threatening academic consequences for students who dare to speak out. This is just suppression by another name.

What makes this bill even more alarming is its hypocrisy.

While it bans excused absences for civic activism, it explicitly allows students to leave school for religious instruction. This is an obvious case favoring one form of expression over another and violating the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

The message is clear: students can miss class for religion but not to advocate for their rights or the rights of others. I personally believe that students should be excused for religious instruction AND they should be excused for civic activism.

This attack on the First Amendment should ring alarm bells for defenders of the Second Amendment. Both amendments are foundational to our democracy—protecting our freedoms of speech, assembly, and the right to bear arms. If you are a fierce defender of 2A then you must also be a fierce defender of 1A.

History tells us that the erosion of constitutional rights often starts with the suppression of dissenting voices.

Defending the Second Amendment means standing up for the First. If we allow the government to dictate when and how we can exercise our free speech, we're on a dangerous path where all our rights are at risk.

Now is the time to act. Contact your local representatives and tell them to oppose SB246. Speak out on social media, attend legislative hearings, and support student activists fighting to protect their rights.

Today it's student voices under threat—tomorrow it will be yours.

Freedom is a package deal. If we don't defend every amendment, we risk losing them all. Stand up. Speak out. Defend the Constitution.

Share your thoughts and comments at chrisjoneslistens@gmail.com.