House debates racism education bill

In June, the Ohio House State and Local Government Committee began deliberation on legislation – H.B. 322 sponsored by Representative Don Jones (R-Freeport) – on the controversial issue of what some refer to as "critical race theory."

Key provisions of the bill would prohibit schools from teaching: that one race is inherently superior to another race or sex; that an individual – by virtue of race or sex -- is inherently racist, sexist or oppressive; that an individual – by virtue of race or sex – bears responsibility for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race or sex; and, that the advent of slavery in the United States constituted the true founding of the nation.

"The goal of that indoctrination is to alter how our children view the United States," Representative Jones said in testimony before the committee. "The goal is to train children to believe the United States is fundamentally racist, and by association our children are somehow inherently racist."

"Just because the bill prohibits inculcating that the United States and its citizens are inherently racist does not mean the unfortunate parts of our history cannot be taught," he continued. "Nowhere in this bill does it say the atrocities of racism, slavery, and their effects on our nation and nation's laws cannot or should not be taught. In fact, they need to be taught."

The committee also considered legislation (H.B. 327) introduced by Representatives Sarah Fowler Arthur (R-Rock Creek) and Diane Grendell (R-Chesterland) that would prohibit schools from teaching "divisive concepts" – including that the United States is fundamentally racist or sexist -- or accepting private funding to further them. The bill would allow "divisive concepts" to be discussed as long as no particular ideology is being promoted. According to Representative Fowler Arthur, a law is needed to prevent schools from teaching students that they are responsible and bear guilt for events that happened before they were born.