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Transcript of Remarks to Cordova High School Students and Staff
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The thing I want to talk about, that's happened recently, and I never from my years of teaching and administration, I do not get into religion and I do not get into politics with my students. It's not that I don't—I'm not involved in them. I am deeply involved in them. But it's that my belief is those things should reflect your values, and your values is something you should get from your parents. So, I always want to have students go to their parents when they have questions about their values and how that value should be reflected in their faith, or in their politics, and you want to align those decisions about religion and politics with those values and with truth. And also, I am not a conspiracy theorist. I have no beliefs in some great overarching illuminati group that's taking over anything.

But some stuff happened last week that I do have some problems with, that I think affects you, and I want to help you think about them—I'm not going to tell you what to think, I just want to help you think. And no, it's not about the Capitol riots, that was ignorance at the highest levels. I don't know too many people that are going to be okay with what happened. I don't care what side you agree with, we don't practice sedition, we don't attack our legislature. But no, it's what's going on with Twitter and Facebook and Google and Apple, and their decision as private companies to filter and to decide what you can hear and know about. And this isn't about Trump, I'm not getting into that, this is about speech, because there have been times even in American history where a small group of people decided what you can hear. You think about McCarthyism [sic]—if you don't know about that, you can google that, or talk to your social studies teacher. But think about totalitarian governments: think about North Korea, think about China, what makes those types of systems possible is the restriction and the elimination of the free exchange of ideas. And America, and in democracies, we talk about the marketplace of ideas. Well, what happens when the marketplace of ideas becomes a forced monopoly? What happens when you do not have dissenting opinions, when you do not have an exchange on competing ideas—how do you know if your ideas can stand on their own if there is no marketplace of ideas?

And I'm not saying that because I'm in favor of Parler, or if I'm in favor of Donald Trump, or if I'm in favor of anybody else who is being banned, or their app is being told you cannot be in the marketplace of ideas because you do not follow our prescribed ideas and values. I have a huge issue with that. And to me, this became a problem back in 1990s—the 1990s, the early 1990s, in an event that in history has become known as “Waco.” And you, most of y'all weren't even alive, but your teachers and your parents will know about this. I was not a part of the Branch Davidians, I don't have anything for or against the Branch Davidians or David Koresh, but what happened was because there was a religious group in Waco, Texas, that some folks thought was a little bit odd, the government decided that they needed to go in and check them out. And of course, they were doing some things that most people would have thought was a little bit outside the norm, or maybe way outside the norm. That's not the point. The point was that a group of people decided that somebody who disagreed, who thought differently or looked differently from them needed to be filtered, needed to be reined in, needed to be controlled by somebody else.

Well, that was a religious group, and I belong to a religious group. What happens if one day a different group of people thinks that my religion is different, or funny, or should be brought into control, or should be filtered. Take that into speech. Maybe right now I'm in the norm, maybe right now my speech is not too outlandish, or too crazy. You might disagree, but I'm not espousing violence, or racism, or sexism, or anything else that as a culture we deem inappropriate. But what if a different group comes into power that no longer likes what I have to say, or how I think, or if they begin to think that I'm extreme—at some point, any time we allow a group of people to tell another group of people you can't think this, you can't say this, you can't write this, and you can't go to places where it is talked about, and that's just one step away from now that happening to you. Because right now it may be that the ideas that you value are shared by the people who are in power and filtering those people who are not in power. But it's just one election or one moment away from now that being flipped.

And I'm only getting into this because as a young person, this is your future. You have a future ahead of you, and you will be developing your ideas and your values and the ways that you want to express yourself. And I am not on Twitter, I'm not on Facebook, I'm not on any social media,

my children are not on any social media—I am 100% against Twitter and Facebook and Instagram, not because they in and of themselves are bad platforms, but what is happening on them, I am not in favor of that. And this is, this is—predates all of these things. I got off social media years and years ago. But because these, these entities - Twitter, Facebook, Google, and Apple - are so powerful, and they have unilaterally made a decision of what you can and cannot see on their platforms, that's a major issue and I want you to understand that. I want you to understand the problem that's going to face you and your generation if there is no longer a marketplace, a free exchange of ideas.

So, if Twitter and Facebook particularly want to establish themselves as a marketplace of ideas, and if Google and Apple want to position themselves as the market where those things can be downloaded and purchased, that then they unilaterally, outside of the elective process decide what you can and cannot hear, that should be very chilling for you. That should be very frightening for you, not because of the ideas that are being blocked, or being filtered, but because there is somebody making that decision that does not have any accountability. They're not elected, they're not—they're not responsible or accountable to you, other than financially. So sure, you can decide to take yourself off Facebook or Twitter, as I have done, but that's it. That's the only accountability measure they have, and I'm not comfortable with that. And I'm not in power, I don't have any say, other than I want to help you guys think through it. You may be in agreement with the people who are doing the filtering, but it's just one moment away from somebody else being able to filter you. And so, if they can do that to a minority—or if they can do that to a powerful voice, it doesn't have to be a minority—what will stop them one day from doing that to you?

Just like Waco: I'm not a Branch Davidian, but what's going to stop them from coming to my church, and saying that, because we are not what they think we should be, then they have the ability to control that and filter that. So just some things to think about, I know it's a little bit differently [sic] than what I normally talk about. And hopefully that helps you understand that this is a big deal, it may not seem that way because you're fifteen, sixteen, seventeen years old, and you don't have a lot of the perspective that older people have. You don't remember Waco, and you don't remember Ruby Ridge, and you maybe haven't studied or read about

McCarthyism [sic], and what all happened, and how many people lost their jobs, and their lives even, because of association, or because of thoughts they may have had—or just wonderings. Can we not just wonder anymore about things?

So, anyway, think about that. Talk to your parents about it. If you trust your teacher, talk to your teacher about it. Be aware, be in the loop as far as what's going on. And not whether or not you agree or disagree with the people being filtered, but can this happen to you one day? And think about that, and just remember that our power is in our choices. We can choose our actions, but not our consequences. So, make wise choices, and have a great week.