



Lafayette Citizens Against Censorship (LCAC) strongly condemns statements made by Councilman Josh Carlson at the [Lafayette Parish Council Meeting on June 7, 2022](#) (start at approx. 41 minute mark), related to [Agenda Item 13](#), Appointment to Library Board of Control (BoC). Mr. Carlson’s statements undermining the media, accusations that activists are spreading rumors and conflating information, and false correlation that certain library materials promote the “sexualization” of children, are all dangerous to a free and democratic society and cannot go unaddressed, especially when they are made by an elected official at a public meeting.

In his remarks, Mr. Carlson made generalizations, without evidence, about the media operations and motives, including that a contingent in Lafayette is “more than likely” feeding conflated stories to the national media, so that they (contingent) can then turn around and claim that Lafayette is receiving negative national press attention. He also claimed that “harm” has come from community members trying to undermine the BoC and Parish Council, rather than from the nefarious actions of some BoC members. Since he implored people to stop running to the media, and instead come together with facts, LCAC shares the following:

1. Carlson is using the same tactics to attack the media as have controversial leaders like former President [Donald Trump](#) and the late Alabama Governor [George Wallace](#): When the media reports something that casts them or their allies in a bad light or threatens their personal agenda, the response is a simple “they’re lying.” Likewise, they employ a classic tactic of undermining people without evidence when they label activists who have exposed unfavorable truths as people spreading falsehoods or mere troublemakers stirring the pot.
2. Carlson stated that not one book has been banned in LPL in 75 years, and that media headlines are reporting otherwise. He’s correct; no book has been banned. However, he is incorrect to claim that there were any headlines stating

this. Carlson appointee Robert Judge made the [same false statement](#) at the March 21, 2022 Library BoC meeting, that media headlines read “LPL bans books” and that this was to sell stories. Just as [correction of that falsehood](#) was needed at the April 18, 2022 BoC meeting, it is necessary now. Mr. Carlson conveniently leaves out that even though no material has yet been banned, it was not for lack of trying by certain Board members. At the [November 2021](#) and [April 2022](#) meetings, Board members Judge’s and Stephanie Armbruster’s indicated they wanted materials banned from the collection; in November, members Landon Boudreaux and former member Doug Palombo only voted to keep the challenged material because it was moved to the adult section. Judge and Armbruster also voted to have materials challenged by out-of-parish political operative Michael Lunsford banned when they each served as the Board member representative on the Library’s Reconsideration Committee. Further, at the February 21, 2022 meeting, the BoC [voted to change the make-up of the Reconsideration Committee](#) to more heavily favor Board Members, for very apparent reasons, as Ms. Armbruster noted: they’re not [“satisfying the people who complained”](#) [i.e. the people who request materials be banned],” even though all complaints filed have been by non-residents of Lafayette Parish. LCAC calls out Mr. Carlson on the false information he posited, as meeting minutes and audio recordings of BoC meetings do not support his claims.

3. Carlson claims that BoC members are ensuring the Library’s financial stability, yet Armbruster stated she had [opposed the 2018 millage renewal](#) and Judge declined to provide his stance. The failed 2018 millage renewal [cost the Library \\$3.6 M in annual revenue](#). Armbruster and Judge also damaged the library’s reputation and cost the institution precious resources as they were vocal on numerous occasions in their opposition to the Library’s planned Drag Queen Story Time in 2018. Further, Ms. Armbruster and her husband advocated moving \$10M from the Library budget in 2019. Judge, Armbruster, and Boudreaux also have known associations with Michael Lunsford, whose organization has been behind the majority of attacks on LPL since 2018 and is the reason for its current precarious financial state.
4. Mr. Carlson claims that the Library is a place of education, welcome and open to everybody regardless of background, income, or viewpoint, and he guarantees every BoC member would probably echo those exact same things. While LCAC agrees that this is how it should be, past statements made by Robert Judge and others at past meetings make it clear that [they seek to limit the scope of programming and collection purchases, catering selections to who they see as the conservative majority](#). Further, if certain BoC members want to make the

Library and meetings a welcoming space, Judge should not continue to open meetings with a blatantly Christian prayer, while denying others the right to share their own prayers or religious words.

5. Mr. Carlson claims he hasn't seen any attacks from BoC made against groups or viewpoints; only a desire to protect children from "sexualization" and move certain books to the adult section. Further comments from him indicate that this "sexualization" is coming in the form of LGBTQ+ literature, as he specifically mentioned books which were challenged and a book "where there was a picture of a minor child performing oral sex on a man," and how he didn't want books like that where his 8-year-old son could access them. First, LCAC requests Mr. Carlson provide the book title and page number where he saw such a picture; as none of the challenged books contained any such image, this appears to be a conflated statement designed for shock value. Second, neither the BoC [bylaws](#), its [general directives](#), nor the Library [mission](#) contain any language about "protecting children," much less from library materials. In fact, Library policy specifically states that the Library doesn't act *in loco parentis*. If Mr. Carlson or others are concerned about what their children might find on their own in the Library, it is their responsibility to accompany their children. A parent has the right to decide what is appropriate for their own child, instead of being subjected to Mr. Carlson's very narrow definition based on his own beliefs. Finally, as mentioned before, Armbruster and Judge vocalized two times their desire to **ban** materials.
6. This isn't the first time Carlson has made false claims at public meetings. At the [February 9, 2021 Council meeting](#), he claimed that politics had nothing to do with Robert Judge's controversial appointment to the BoC, yet public records requests revealed that Carlson and other Council members consulted with out-of-parish political operative Michael Lunsford and BoC member Boudreaux to discuss candidates [based on political leanings](#), and Boudreaux had also reached out to a Council Member with the goal of building a more conservative presence on the Board. He also claimed at the same meeting the BoC's rejection of the Voters' Rights Grant had nothing to do with racism and that the majority of the media coverage about the Board's debacle was false, yet [racist motives](#) were later uncovered.

LCAC requests that Josh Carlson issue a public apology for his remarks, as they are incendiary, divisive and, most importantly, false or at best misleading. LCAC also requests Mr. Carlson go to the source (meeting minutes and audio and authoritative news sources) before making future statements, so his information is accurate when it is entered into public record. Finally, we ask him to reflect on how he wants history to

remember him. Right now, Lafayette Parish is in the grip of anti-tax political operatives and far-right religious and political groups, members of which have inserted themselves into local politics regardless of their own parish domicile. Their influence is evidenced in various public boards, not least of which is the Library BoC. We ask Mr Carlson to keep in mind [Rep. Liz Cheney's \(R-WY\) wise words to her fellow Republicans](#) who still insist on defending Donald Trump's actions on January 6 and deny any wrongdoing on his part: "Tonight, I say this to my Republican colleagues who are defending the indefensible: There will come a day when Donald Trump is gone, but your dishonor will remain," she said. Don't defend the indefensible, Mr. Carlson, lest your own dishonor become your public service legacy.

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