



## A shadow war on libraries

Some Canadian politicians and influencers, inspired by an American-born movement, are trying to roll back 2SLGBTQ+ rights in Canada — one book at a time.

By Grant LaFleche, Rachel Ward, Mark Kelley Feb. 7, 2025

There was a time, not so very long ago, when there was no place Theo Robertson wanted to be other than the small prairie town of Valleyview, Alta.

It is here, in a town tucked between Sturgeon Lake and the Little Smoky River about 350 kilometres northwest of Edmonton, that Robertson was raised. It is where she went to school and met friends. It is where she works in her grandfather's garage to earn pocket money.

But Valleyview no longer feels like home to the 17-year-old transgender teenager. The town now conjures up a darker feeling.

"I feel terrorized almost. I feel like existing in my community has just become harder than it was ever intended to be," said Robertson.

On the streets of the town, in public meetings and on social media, Robertson says she has been openly accosted by adults because of her gender. And it all started when she stood up for the public library.

Since 2023, a fierce debate over the fate of the library has exposed political fault lines in the once close-knit town of nearly 1,800 people. Defenders of the library and the local 2SLGBTQ+ community have been pitted against a secretive town council and its allies.

The fight is a deeply personal one for Robertson, who founded Valleyview's gay-straight alliance club, or GSA, in the library. Teens in the club say it is the only refuge in town for them — one Robertson now fears will be erased.

The conflict came to a head on Jan. 29, when the town-controlled majority on the board voted to close and move the library into a soon-to-be-built school complex. The space afforded to the library will be half its current size and potentially be subject to restrictive provincial rules around 2SLGBTQ+ expression in schools.

"This feels like this was the nail in the coffin," said Robertson. "I don't think anybody at our GSA would feel safe having the group at the new school."



The debate over the fate of the public library in Valleyview, Alta., has deeply divided the once close-knit town of nearly 1,800 people. (Jon Castell/CBC)

The experience in Valleyview is not an isolated one. An investigation by *The Fifth Estate* has found there is a shadow war in Canada against libraries and books. Its leading political actors, from small towns to large political parties, are linked to a broader grassroots movement. Steeped in conspiracy theories, this movement has stoked fears about gender identity education, child abuse and teachers.

Sometimes activists have moved through legitimate processes, including elections, running campaigns in often-overlooked races for school or library boards. Other times, they use established book challenge processes at libraries, which has caused a dramatic rise in attempts to ban books in Canada.

By analyzing more than a dozen hours of video footage, book challenge data, social media activity and secret recordings, *The Fifth Estate* traced this web of influence to the United States, where an anti-2SLGBTQ+ campaign evolved from right-wing campaign rhetoric to laws that threaten libraries in Republican states.

The battle language of this movement is found in events held by the political activist group Take Back Alberta (TBA), where the audience was told books, libraries and schools are weapons being used to corrupt children's souls and destroy Western civilization. With the stakes this high, Take Back Alberta's firebrand leader David Parker urged his listeners to act.



A map highlighting Alberta with the city of Valleyview as the primary location in with a red square marker and white background with black text. The secondary locations in Alberta of: Jasper, Edmonton, Red Deer, Calgary and Grande Prairie.

© [OpenStreetMap](#) contributors

We are on the precipice of a communist revolution. It's literally happening right before your eyes. If we rise up, we can stop it," Parker told his followers at one of these events. "If you're too busy to save your civilization, then you deserve the gulags."

In Valleyview, the movement's influence looms over the landscape. On the highway into town, local business owner Rod Perron erected a massive tower in his canola field. Draped over its frame is a banner with an unmistakable message: "Taking Alberta Back."

"I think it means to me that we're moving in the right direction, getting back to our core roots," said Perron. "I guess Take Back Alberta has a lot of influence on social issues."

The debate over social issues is tied the fate of the library in Valleyview and became so divisive that one of the town councillors pleaded for unity.

"Let's not go into the community and cause a big divide," said Coun. Samantha Steinke at an April 2024 town hall meeting. "We have half the community hating the other half of the community."



Rod Perron's Taking Alberta Back tower in his canola field in Valleyview is a physical reminder of the influence of the Take Back Alberta grassroots movement in the small town. (Jon Castell/CBC)

## A place to be themselves

For decades, Valleyview's library has stood on 50th Avenue, a road known around town as "Main Street." It is home to more than books. It is a hub of community programs for kids, new Canadians and seniors, from reading time to computer classes.

There, surrounded by the stacks and shelves, a small group of 2SLGBTQ+ youth regularly gather. They play board games. They watch movies. They eat pizza.

Above all, they feel safe.

"It's sort of like a youth group with the underlying notion that we are accepting and that we love everybody," said Robertson. "They already identify as LGBT, and we just provide a space for them to be and to exist."

Some GSA members, like 18-year-old Grade 12 student Jazmin, said they were not comfortable meeting as a group at school.

"This space is definitely better than school because there's several teachers who have expressed their opinion about queer students," Jazmin told *The Fifth Estate*.

"It makes me feel like maybe this isn't who I'm supposed to be, like maybe I have to change myself because it's wrong," she said. CBC News is not publishing her full name to maintain her privacy for her protection.

In an emailed statement to *The Fifth Estate*, the Northern Gateway Public Schools, the school board that will get the town's library, said concerns about teachers' views of 2SLGBTQ+ students have not been raised with their administration.



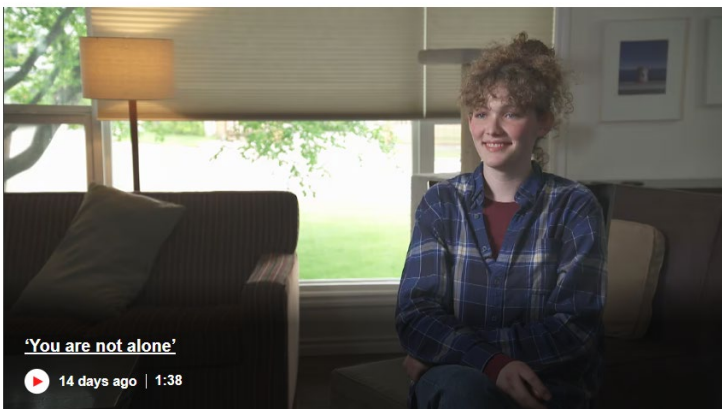
Theo Robertson, 17, started the local gay-straight alliance in the Valleyview library so local 2SLGBTQ+ youth had a safe space to meet. She fears the club will close when the library moves into a yet-to-be built school complex. (Rob Krbavac/CBC)

Former library board director Debbie Stewart said outside the library walls, some townsfolk were suspicious of the local GSA.

"It wasn't some ulterior agenda. I mean it was just to help these kids have a safe place to meet because some of them aren't supported at home unfortunately," said Stewart. "A lot of people took exception with that."

Whatever the attitudes about the GSA in some corners of Valleyview, the town government made no public issue out of it. In fact, library staff had no idea their workplace would soon be the centre of controversy.

WATCH | 'It doesn't matter what you identify as':



The first sign of trouble arrived in 2023 as an oblique warning from the network of libraries in Canada that regularly communicate, said librarian Liz Griffiths-Garcia.

The message was stark — a storm was coming.

“You need to watch out because these people are a thing, and they might start trying to infiltrate your library board, they might start trying to influence things or censor books or make waves,” Griffiths-Garcia said she was told.

"These people," as Griffiths-Garcia calls them, have made their presence known across Canada as the COVID-19 pandemic retreated. Protesters made headlines demonstrating outside libraries in opposition to drag queens reading books to kids and their parents, waving “protect the children” signs and making spurious claims of grooming, indoctrination and child abuse.



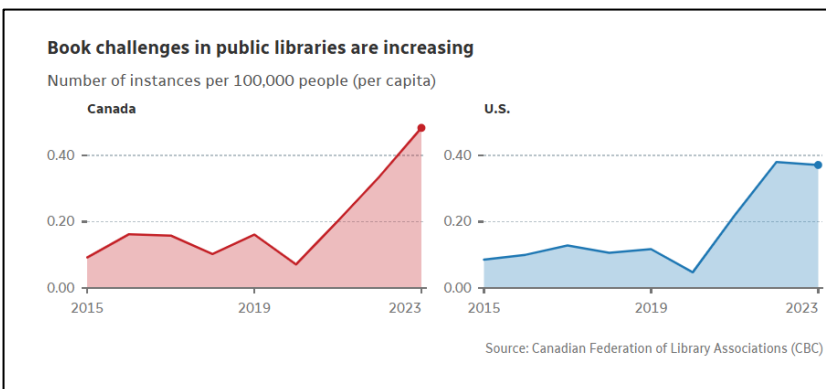
Protests against 2SLGBTQ+ books and drag story time readings for children in libraries have risen in cities across Canada in recent years, like this 2023 demonstration in Calgary. At these events, some protesters have made false claims of grooming and child abuse directed at the libraries. (CBC)

Beyond the public protests, there were more organized attempts to advance their agenda.

As the country began to crawl out from pandemic lockdowns in 2021, formal challenges to books in libraries began a sharp climb upward.

By 2023, book challenges in Canada increased nearly four times the pre-pandemic average, according to new peer-reviewed research by the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA).

### Book challenges in public libraries are increasing



A multiple line chart tracking book challenges in public libraries since 2025 to 2023 for both the U.S in blue, and Canada in Red.

Source: Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CBC)

Researchers Michael Nyby and Richard Ellis found book challenges also changed in character. Previously, the small number of challenges were focused on material that could be considered racist or homophobic. Post-COVID, those challenges are intently focused on 2SLGBTQ+ materials — including books about gender identity, educational books on sexuality and even books that have gay or transgender characters.

Nearly half the book challenges in Canada in 2023 were related to 2SLGBTQ+ materials, up from 9.8 per cent in 2019.

This shift did not happen in isolation. Ellis and Nyby found challenges in Canada echoed those in the United States. The same titles are often targets on both sides of the border.

"Given that the sudden about-face in Canadian library censorship trends closely followed a historic increase in similar challenges in the United States, it is difficult to imagine anything other than cross-border influence as the likely catalyst," wrote Ellis and Nyby.

Challenges sometimes succeed in getting books moved from one section of a library to another, but more often than not they fail to have books removed entirely.

Sometimes, those opposed to 2SLGBTQ+-themed books turned to more clandestine ways to attack books.

"We've always had challenges," said Kelly Lauzon, a librarian at the public library in Airdrie, Alta., and a member of the CFLA's intellectual freedom committee. "We've definitely seen an uptake in challenges, both indirect and direct to those types of materials."

In 2023, those indirect challenges at the Airdrie library resulted in some books related to 2SLGBTQ+ themes and characters being flushed in used toilets in the women's washroom. Lauzon said her library was not about to let vandals win the day. She reordered the books.

"Some people want to teach their kids about sex. Some people do not. And that's OK," Lauzon said. "That's your freedom. But it is not your right to take that material away from other people who would like to teach their kids about gender identity and sex."



Kelly Lauzon, a librarian at the public library in Airdrie, Alta., and a member of the CFLA's intellectual freedom committee, says attempts to remove 2SLGBTQ+-themed books from library shelves in Canada are on the rise.

(Monty Kruger/CBC)

In Valleyview, a novel approach was taken to remove the books.

Local resident and self-described white "ethnocentrist" T.J. Kennedy — a photographer with connections to the local member of the provincial legislature and an influential Valleyview political family — took to the social media platform X in April 2024 to declare he was borrowing 2SLGBTQ+-themed children's books from the library.

He encouraged others to follow his lead and “create a perpetual book borrowing cycle that keeps these books off the shelves and in your dark closet at home out of reach and out of sight of any poor child they are wanting to groom.”

In an emailed statement to *The Fifth Estate*, Kennedy said “my motivation is to protect my children and this community's children from sexualization.”

The loss of books with gender identity themes or information can have a serious impact on 2SLGBTQ+ kids and their parents as they are trying to navigate the sometimes fraught landscape of gender identity, said Florence Ashley, an academic and associate law professor at the University of Alberta.

Those resources can help teens understand themselves, said Ashley, and are an invaluable tool for parents who need help to help their children.

“Another thing is on a more basic level,” said Ashley, who is trans. “If you see books in the public library treating queer and trans characters as just a matter of course, then you're much more likely to just realize that, ‘Hey, maybe hating queer and trans people just because they're queer and trans is just not the way to go.’”



The GSA at Valleyview's library has been a safe haven for local 2SLGBTQ+ youth. The club faces an uncertain future now that the town is moving the library into a yet-to-be-built school complex. (Rob Krbavac/CBC)

### **The fabricated enemy at the gates**

If Valleyview's town councillors had objections to what was on the library's shelves, they never said anything publicly. There were no public notices or debates in council chambers. But in December 2023, they cut \$60,000, about half the town's portion of funding, from the library budget.

Library staff said they learned about the cut from the local rumour mill.

"There is no coming back from 50 per cent," library director Kerri Danner can be heard saying in a video of an emergency library board meeting in December 2023 obtained by *The Fifth Estate*.

At the meeting was Coun. Ken Wittig, town council's lone member on the library board. He did not provide a definitive reason for the budget cut, but suggested the town's finances were a part of it, saying the town had not raised taxes in years.

“As a taxpayer, I would like to be approached about that though before I hear that services are being cut,” Danner said.

"Well, we're not cutting services," Wittig said.

"You are. Library services," Danner said. "You're cutting library services."

One board member asked Wittig if the budget cut was a way to starve the library to justify moving it into a planned new Northern Gateway Public Schools complex in the town — a move the library board rejected a year earlier.

"I don't think that's the case whatsoever," Wittig said.

Members of town council, including Mayor Vern Lymburner, declined to speak to *The Fifth Estate*. They unanimously passed a motion in November behind closed doors, shortly before *The Fifth Estate's* planned arrival in Valleyview, saying no member of the elected council can speak to the media.

In a two-sentence statement uploaded to the council's Nov. 25 minutes on the town's website, the council said that any decisions it makes are in the best interests of the town's ratepayers, but did not mention the library.



50th Avenue in Valleyview, known to residents as 'Main Street,' is a hub of business activity and has been the home of the town's library for decades. (Jon Castell/CBC)

The state of Valleyview's finances are not entirely clear in part because the town, unlike most Alberta municipalities, does not publish its annual budgets.

And there is no local news media in Valleyview to report on council deliberations — the town's only newspaper closed during the pandemic.

The council does post minutes of meetings, but they rarely include reports or details of debates. Council also does not livestream its meetings, having passed a resolution that forbids "recordings of any sort of council meetings as any recordings can be utilized in the future for legal purposes."

However, a 2023 audited budget statement obtained by *The Fifth Estate* shows the town ended 2023 with a \$1-million deficit, despite projecting a \$5-million surplus. The town also had nearly \$6 million in cash reserves.

"I don't believe it's the money issue at all," said Travis Werklund, vice-president of Valleyview's chamber of commerce.

"Sixty thousand dollars is not going to impact having to spend money for the roads or water storage after last year's fire season ... I don't think that \$60,000 has anything to do with either of those projects."

During the December 2023 emergency library board meeting, a furious Danner told Wittig the town council had better brace itself for the town's reaction to the budget cut.



"My gut is telling me that council has no idea of the backlash you're going to get," she said.

## Taking the libraries back

Valleyview's library being in the midst of a political storm was new to the town, but is in keeping with Take Back Alberta's stated aim of creating change by seizing control of the low hanging fruit of democracy, like school and library boards.

"I say this to all of you: Who here feels that horrible things are happening in our libraries?" Take Back Alberta leader Parker said during a 2023 rally outside Calgary city hall.

"The answer right now is that we have to get engaged. Every one of you has to begin participating in their democracy. If you want them to leave your kids alone, you have to be the ones making the decision about how that happens."

Low voter turnout, he said, is the key to victory.

"Albertans and Canadians are apathetic and lazy. They never show up," he said during another October 2023 speech in Calgary. "You could take over every school board in this entire province."



David Parker, seen here at the 2024 United Conservative Party annual general meeting in Alberta, is the man behind Take Back Alberta. To some, he is a divisive force in Alberta politics. To others, he is a grassroots hero.

(Andy Hincenbergs/CBC)

Parker knows a thing or two about political success, having turned Take Back Alberta into a force in Alberta politics.

The group claims responsibility for forcing former Alberta premier Jason Kenney's resignation in 2022. And when the governing United Conservative Party held elections for its board of directors in 2023, several candidates sought Parker's endorsement — including Valleyview town Coun. Samantha Steinke.

"We're endorsing Sam," Parker said in a video in which TBA vetted candidates. Steinke, he said, was the "only TBA person" running for a board position and "was one of the key organizers behind the entire freedom movement here in Alberta."

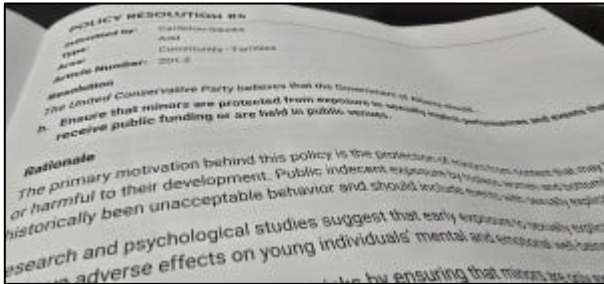
Steinke's UCP connection runs in the family. Her husband, Nathan Steinke, works in the office of Todd Lowen, a UCP member of the provincial legislature and Alberta's minister of forests and parks. Prior to becoming a town councillor in 2021, Samantha Steinke ran the local UCP constituency association.

Samantha Steinke was on the stage at the 2024 UCP annual general meeting in Red Deer, having won her board election, where thousands of party members were in attendance. Parker glad-handed his way through the crowds.

“There are 2,288 people from Take Back Alberta that are here,” Parker told *The Fifth Estate* in an interview from the floor of the convention. “That is just the people on my list.”

If Parker’s claim is true, Take Back Alberta followers made up nearly 40 per cent of the UCP membership at the meeting. Alberta Premier Danielle Smith distanced herself from Parker in February 2024 after his social media commentary about federal Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre’s marriage. But TBA’s influence in the wider UCP remains.

Parker watched as party members voted on policy resolutions, informed by TBA’s positions, opposing gender affirming care, GSA rules and diversity and inclusion policies.



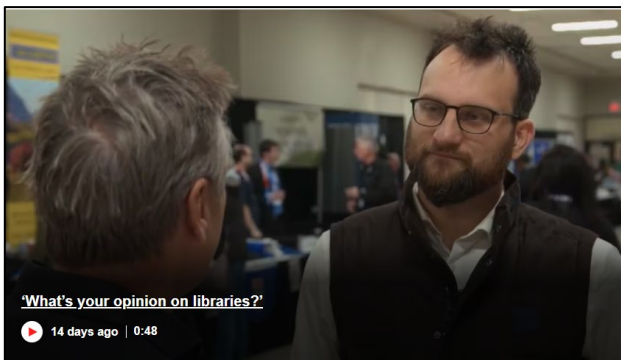
In November, members of the UCP in Alberta voted overwhelmingly in favour of policy resolutions like this one, which takes aim at drag story time events in public libraries.

(Grant LaFleche/CBC)

The politics championed by Take Back Alberta are not limited to Wild Rose Country. There are similar efforts in other provinces.

In 2022 municipal elections in British Columbia and Ontario, for instance, candidates from groups such as "Vote Against The Woke" and "ParentsVoice B.C." ran in school board elections, although they only won a handful of seats.

### **WATCH | 'I just speak what I believe to be true':**



The face of local government is changing as a result of these types of electoral efforts, said Paul McLauchlin, the president of Alberta’s Rural Municipalities Association, who has served five terms in rural municipal politics.

Disinformation campaigns are stirring up voters around fabricated issues, he said, resulting in the election of politicians whose agendas have nothing to do with the often mundane tasks of

maintaining roads or passing land use bylaws.

“Undeniably, you can definitely create pretty big armies on wars that may or may not exist,” McLauchlin said. “And I think that you can start to feed people on some concerns that they have and create this bigger enemy; the bigger the enemy you create, the more people that’ll join your side.”

And the politics of real or imagined grievances can tear at the fabric of a community.

“I think that when you deal with a small community, that can divide a council. I know people that will never talk to each other ever again over issues like this,” McLauchlin said.

In Valleyview, the library board is not elected, but chosen by town council. In the past, the library would select prospective board members who applied and present its choices to the town council for approval.

But in 2024, council unilaterally replaced some of the strongest library defenders on the board — including GSA supporter Debbie Stewart — and appointed its own hand-picked members. That resulted in the eight-member board being split down the middle between old and new members.

The town broke the impasse by adding a ninth member to the board.



Paul McLauchlin, president of Alberta's Rural Municipalities Association, says disinformation is influencing voters to elect candidates for town councils and school boards whose political agendas have little do with the actual jobs of those bodies. (Andy Hincenbergs/CBC)

## A town divided

As the library debate in Valleyview heated up, common ground became increasingly less common, and the teens who found refuge in the GSA felt like they were becoming outcasts.

"My idea of common ground is being able to exist in this community," said Robertson.

"And I think what [some town residents] think I mean by that is that people like me will suddenly start to control their town and that the rise in acceptance for people like me means that there will be a sudden spike in population of people like me and that we will take over ... but that's not true."

Robertson said hostility toward the local 2SLGBTQ+ community has become more open. During the 2024 annual town parade, Robertson was part of a Pride float. She was handing out candy to parade goers along the route when one man, in full view of other adults, harshly rebuffed the teen with homophobic slurs.

Roberston said the other adults nearby did nothing.

"I think really that we're kind of forgetting to be human beings and we're kind of just running with the biggest stick we can find," said Valleyview mechanic Ken Hoedl, Robertson's grandfather.



Travis Werklund, vice-president of Valleyview's Chamber of Commerce and owner of the now-closed Tall Timbers café, says his business had to be shuttered as debate over the town's library heated up. ( Jon Castell/CBC)

Other vocal defenders of the library were also victims of malicious smears, including Travis

Werklund. Aside from his role at the chamber of commerce, he is an outspoken gay man and was the owner of the Tall Timbers café.

His café was once a hub of activity, even welcoming Premier Smith during a visit in the summer of 2023.

As the library debate raged on through 2023, Werklund says town employees, a core slice of his customer base, stopped coming to the café.

He says the decline in customers was fatal and by the summer of 2024, Tall Timbers was shuttered.

"It is the end of a dream," said Werklund. "Standing up for what I thought was just and right and loving actually backfired on me."

### **LISTEN | *Divisions in a small town:***

Shortly afterwards, T.J. Kennedy — the man who tried to get 2SLGBTQ+ books off the library shelves in town — celebrated the Tall Timber's closing with an X post dripping with damaging false accusations aimed at Werklund. Kennedy is friends with Samantha Steinke, and he said she helped him land a job with local MLA Todd Loewen.

The post included a selfie showing a grinning Kennedy pointing at the cafe's "closed" sign.

"Local groomer's business shut down permanently," wrote Kennedy. "Too bad so sad. FAFO."

In social media parlance, FAFO is both a warning and victory chant: "F—k around and find out."

"The more times that they say [groomer], the more people that believe it," said Werklund. "And it's filled with hate.... Those who know me will know that this is about hate."

### **WATCH | *The full documentary from The Fifth Estate:***

Not everyone in town believes the 2SLGBTQ+ community is a target of discrimination, including Rod Perron, the man with the Taking Alberta Back tower.

Valleyview, he says, is an accepting place, but those who support cutting the library budget, which he sees as a purely financial issue, are being unfairly painted as bigots.

"I think the gay thing, it's just like if you're not out there dancing on the street with them, well, then they're saying that there's something wrong with you," said Perron. "I don't feel that they're discriminated [against] at all in our town. Maybe they just need to focus on something different and they'll probably fit in just fine."

### **The conspiracy no one can see**

The hostility toward 2SLGBTQ+ materials and programs in libraries in schools is explicit in Take Back Alberta events and rallies. *The Fifth Estate* has examined hours of video of these events featuring Parker at the microphone, where the mechanics of a sprawling conspiracy aimed at children are laid out as a clear and present danger to western civilization.

Those videos show that Parker is far from the only influential voice pushing these claims. In October 2023, Parker introduced a guest speaker at two Take Back Alberta events who described the architecture of the conspiracy.

"They turn the children against family. They turn the children against faith, they turn the children against themselves. They're alienating the children from who they are, incapable of understanding who they are," conservative American author James Lindsay said at a TBA event in Calgary.

"You're a parent, you show up to a school board in the United States and you complain about the perverted books they've got, you're a domestic terrorist," Lindsay said.

Lindsay's conspiracy theory casts schools and libraries as communist revolutionary hotbeds. This rebellion is so insidious, he claims, that no parents can ever see it in action.

"It'll never show up in the curriculum. They'll never show up in the book. And if you see the homework yourself, you'll never get upset about a single question. You have to see what they're doing in the classroom," Lindsay told the TBA crowd. "Let me give you a clue. If you show up that day, they won't do it that day."

Lindsay's views are not an aberration in the United States. *The Fifth Estate* found his rhetoric is a staple of Republican politics, where anti-2SLGBTQ+ sentiment has been turned into law. In several red states, these laws are designed to punish libraries for including 2SLGBTQ+ books in their collections.

"When we say that censorship is the greatest threat to democracy, it is true," said Sherry Scheline, the director of the library in the small town of Donnelly, Idaho, where state legislation has put the library's future at risk. "When the politics comes knocking at our door, we have no choice but to become involved. Librarians have to step up and protect the books. That is our job because by protecting the books, protecting speech, we are protecting democracy as a whole."

In Idaho, for example, the Republican-controlled state legislature passed Bill 710 last year, allowing anyone who finds a library book with content "harmful to minors" — which includes "homosexuality" — to sue the library for damages. If someone complains about a book, the law obligates a library to move it out of reach of minors or face a lawsuit with an automatic fine of \$250, plus damages awarded in a civil court.

In Donnelly, the library has tried to preserve its collection and programs within the law by becoming "adults only." Children can only visit with a parent or if a parent has signed a consent waiver.

"There's no harm on my shelves," Scheline said. "Our teen LGBTQ community is the most hurt by this legislation.... And they deserve to see themselves reflected in literature."



Sherry Scheline, director of the town library in Donnelly, Idaho, says a new law aimed at 2SLGBTQ+ books forced her to make her library 'adults only.' She says anti-library laws are putting librarians on the front line of protecting democracy. (Mary Kienzle/Lightbender Media)

These anti-library laws are the latest manifestation of a current of anti-transgender sentiment roiling through Republican politics for years, said Madison Pauly, an investigative journalist with Mother Jones magazine in California.

Pauly said some Christian nationalist groups and politicians were looking for an issue to engage their base after gay marriage became legal and broadly socially acceptable.

America's small transgender population — less than one per cent of adult Americans, according to the Williams Institute at the University of California — became the target.

"People don't know a lot about transgender rights, this might seem very outside of their experience, so maybe it's something they can't relate to," said Pauly of the rationale used by some social conservatives that she uncovered in her reporting on the movement.

"Let's try to spread misinformation about it and turn this into a political issue that can motivate voters."

It began with stoking fears about transgender people in female bathrooms and sports, and eventually morphed into an attack on schools, libraries and 2SLGBTQ+ books.

"It's been an incremental approach that at this point in the U.S. has become an all-out attack on trans people, their existence, their lives, their ability to live fully as themselves and publicly," said Pauly.

### **The end of an era**

The die was cast. The defenders of Valleyview's library tried to make their voices heard, but they were unable to prevent what was coming.

At a library board meeting on Jan. 29, the final decision was made. In a video of the meeting obtained by *The Fifth Estate*, the five town-picked members of the library board are seen outvoting the other four and deciding that the library would close in its current location and be moved to the new school complex. Like the meetings that preceded it, the deep divisions in Valleyview were on display.

"It is clear to me that a lot of private discussions and decisions have been made," said longtime board member Kelli Reimer when the motion to close the library was debated.

"Excuse me," said Tina Caron, the new board chair. "We are going to stick to the motion laid on the table. We don't need interjections of accusations.... So I need you to stick to the motion."

"I feel that you are not allowing me to speak my opinion or my comments on this matter," Reimer said.

Another board member said Caron was out of order by shutting Reimer down, but after conferring with a new face at the board table seated beside her, Caron dismissed the accusation. The person she spoke with was the newly appointed board record keeper, Nathan Steinke, Samantha Steinke's husband.

Samantha Steinke did not reply to several interview requests from *The Fifth Estate*. An interview request sent to the office of Loewen, the local member of the provincial legislature, went unanswered.

## WATCH | *The board considers the library's fate:*

In the audience was T.J Kennedy, who told *The Fifth Estate* in an emailed statement he sometimes escorts some board members to their cars after meetings to make sure they are safe.

The school board's proposed floor plan shows the library will be moved into a community space about half the size of the current library building. In a recording of the meeting obtained by *The Fifth Estate*, library directors were told the school board — which is chaired by Samantha Steinke's father-in-law — will control the space.

A library in a school has a different character than a public one, said Lauzon of the Airdrie library.

"Public libraries "collect a wide array of material for everybody on all different topics. We rely on parents to choose materials for their children whereas in schools they act in more of a parental capacity that way," she said. "And so the collections policies are quite different from a school to a library."



Robertson is leaving Valleyview for university in August. In the wake of the debate over the town's library, she says she doesn't think she will return. (Rob Krbavec/CBC)

On Feb. 1, library board chair Caron lauded the decision to move the library in a Facebook post, saying it would be a "model of success and innovation."

"I must stress that the school will not, and cannot under Alberta law, have control of the public library," Caron wrote. The debate about the decision continued in the post's comment section.

For Theo Robertson, the decision is a defeat. She will be leaving town for university in August, and does not expect to return.

"I used to think that maybe after I was educated and I had seen the world that I would come back here. Now I don't ever feel like that," she said. "I know how hard it was before. I can't even bear to think about how hard it's going to be to change things now."