

MATTHEW HOY

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Prom debacle demonstrates a lack of common sense

HIGHLIGHTS

School administrators blindly follow “the rules”

Educators want parents to participate in their children's education

Schools then erect ludicrous barriers to parents who want to help



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BY MATTHEW HOY

Voltaire was right. “Common sense is not so common.”

Nearly two years ago, a tumor that had been growing in Jared Springer’s brain made its presence known. Shortly after the school bell rang at Arroyo Grande High School, he felt nauseated, had a massive headache and lost his vision.

He was flown to Cottage Hospital, spent 20 days in a coma, had a tracheotomy, had a feeding tube installed and had a machine breathing for him. Doctors discovered the brain tumor that had caused Jared’s massive brain hemorrhage and stroke.

For many of us, high school was a difficult time. Compared to what Jared has had to go through — the surgeries, the chemotherapy, the physical therapy — we had it easy.

The road back for Jared has been a difficult one. It’s not been without setbacks, including one approximately three weeks ago where he fell out of his wheelchair and broke his hip. After yet another surgery and hospitalization and the pain and the struggle that comes with it, Jared was looking forward to attending senior prom at AGHS.

If you’ve been watching the news or reading this paper, you know [what happened next](#). A school bureaucrat consulted a big book of rules and regulations — something too often antithetical to common sense — and proclaimed the rules prohibited Jared’s presence.

Jared had been out of school because of his illness, and because of that, he could not go to the prom.

Even if they disregarded that little rule, they worried they would not be able to take care of his needs for the short time he would be able to attend prom. When Jared’s mother offered to accompany him, she was told she needed a tuberculosis test and a background check.

We all understand why the rules, such as they are, exist. They exist because we used to trust government officials — from school administrators to federal judges — to use their judgment and discretion, and far too often they made the wrong decisions.

Schools have these regulations because in the past some administrator somewhere made a brain-dead decision and so a law needed to be passed to prevent similar stupidity. This gave us zero-tolerance policies that have the absurd effects, like the [Fort Worth, Texas, high school](#) student who was suspended for having one of those 8-inch wooden souvenir baseball bats in his car. The district officials considered the small club a weapon.

The kicker? The student was on the school’s baseball team. He carried around full-size metal baseball bats in his car too.

We have mandatory minimum sentences for a number of crimes because of case after case of judges handing down wrist slaps to criminals when serious jail time was warranted.

So, when presented with a situation where a decision has to be made regarding a student who should be the exception, the administrators blithely follow the rule.

If there’s one common refrain I’ve heard from teachers over the years, it’s that not enough parents show interest in their children’s education.

And then, when parents offer to help, bureaucrats erect hurdles to prevent them.

A TB test? Fingerprints and a background check?

For busy parents who may want to help out maybe once or twice a year, do we really need to [require them to pay](#) \$45 or more to have their fingerprints run through federal crime databases, on top of \$20 or so for a TB test? It’s not as though the federal government makes it difficult to [identify sex offenders](#).

If you don’t want poor parents, whose children are often the most at-risk, to participate, a \$65 fee is a good barrier.

But these requirements aren’t uniformly applied — for good reason. To attempt it would be unworkable.

Does anyone think schools require that every prom venue on the Central Coast have background checks of all its employees before they can host a dance? How about the DJ?

When parents request to accompany their child to school because of academic or behavioral issues, is the TB test and fingerprinting required before they shadow their child?

You think newspaper or television reporters are required to jump through those hurdles before going to a campus to report on a story?

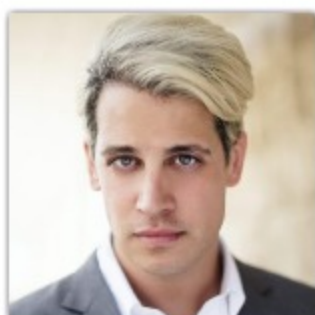
Jared’s story has a happy ending. Brighten A Corner Ministry [will hold a prom](#) for Jared on May 27 at Mountainbrook Church. In addition, he is going to be able to attend San Luis Obispo High School’s prom. And Lucia Mar Superintendent Raynee Daley [has apologized](#) to Jared and his family and they’ve accepted the apology.

Jared will get his prom. Hopefully school administrators countywide will have learned a lesson.

Conservative columnist Matthew Hoy is a former reporter, editor and page designer. His column appears in The Tribune every other Sunday, in rotation with liberal columnist Tom Fulks. Read Hoy’s blog at Hoystory.com. Follow him on Twitter @Hoystory.

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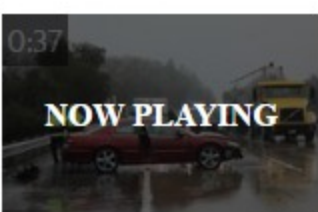
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This is a wise & compassionate essay, surprising & refreshing, considering Mr Hoy is a conservative. Most of the time people on his side of the socio-political divide predictably take the most inhumane stand on any issue. So, hats off to you this time around, sir.
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- Jay Bonestell** · Artist at Bonestell Studios
Kevin Rice I think dichotomies like hard right & hard left are constructs in the human mind. Most people are a mix of compartmentalized, sometimes contradictory opinions & convictions. Regarding authoritarianism & arbitrary rules, the situation with the high school boy being denied participating in the prom is a classic case of inflexible, unreasonable, by the book rules that benefit nobody. It's a mentality driving a machine-like entity like the IRS, where a person can be jailed or have his possessions & property seized just because he failed to pay taxes-- regardless of the individual's actual fault or lack thereof. Agents have gone after celebrities like Willie Nelson & Wesley Snipes who knew little or nothing of how their tax records were being handled by supposed professionals.
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- John Gajdos** · School Of Hard Knocks, University Of Life
You are 100% correct. The timid, mindless bureaucrats who just follow the "book" and are afraid of deviating from the rules are worthless administrators and need to be replaced with people who are not afraid to make exceptions to minor lapses to policy violations.
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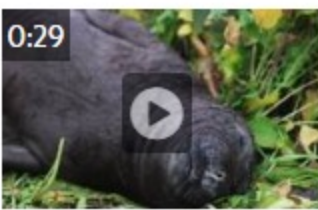
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ABOUT MATTHEW HOY



Matthew Hoy, a conservative, is a San Diego-area native and 1994 graduate of Cal Poly’s journalism program. He spent 15 years at various newspapers along the West Coast, including The Lompoc Record, The Daily World in Aberdeen, Wash., The North County Times in Escondido and The San Diego Union-Tribune. For 15 years, Hoy has written a blog on politics and the media, Hoystory.com. Hoy’s column will be published in The Tribune every other week, in rotation with liberal columnist Tom Fulks.

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