

One Wisconsin Now: Assembly Speaker Vos directed campus free speech attack

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Madison, Wisconsin — Assembly Speaker Robin Vos was the legislator who initiated and directed the development of legislation threatening students with expulsion for exercising their First Amendment right to denounce hate speech on University of Wisconsin campuses, according to a review of drafting records. Documents reviewed by One Wisconsin Now show how a staff person from Vos' office requested model legislation written by a right wing think tank be drafted as a bill for consideration by the Wisconsin legislature.

“The records show this attack on the First Amendment rights of students and faculty to create mandatory safe spaces for racist, sexist, homophobic or xenophobic right-wing provocateurs was instigated at the behest of Robin Vos and overseen by his office,” commented One Wisconsin Now Executive Director Scot Ross. “Doesn't the most powerful guy in the Assembly have something better to do with his time than drafting bills to bully students and intimidate faculty?”

According to an email the Vos office requested a bill be “drafted as is stated in the attachment.” The “Campus Free Speech Act” was produced by the Goldwater Institute, an Arizona based think tank whose operations are underwritten by some of the largest right wing funders including the Bradley, Koch and Walton foundations.

A Vos staffer also added a provision requiring a policy to sanction students for engaging in protests judged to be “indecent, profane or boisterous,” despite concerns raised by the drafting attorney that the language was problematic due to the terms being broad and ambiguous.

In addition to the threats to students, the bill includes a provision requiring institutions to remain “neutral on public policy controversies” that could restrict faculty from doing research or commenting on public policy issues facing the state and the nation.

After directing the drafting of the bill, Vos appears to have turned the bill over to “lead author” fellow Assembly Republican Rep. Jesse Kremer. In a recent radio interview, ostensible bill author Kremer admitted “I agree” with critics who call the bill unconstitutional.

Ross concluded, “Not only would this bill expel students for using their constitutional right to free speech, but also it could inhibit professors from conducting research and releasing research on critical public policy issues. It’s worse than big government, it’s Big Brother.”

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About One Wisconsin Now: One Wisconsin Now is a statewide communications network specializing in effective earned media and online organizing to advance progressive leadership and values.