

# Rep. Berceau: GOP gag rule means free speech for me, not for thee

Posted on Thursday, Jun 22, 2017

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State Representative Terese Berceau (D - Madison), the ranking Democratic member of the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities, issued the following statement regarding Assembly passage of AB 299, the legislation to gag campus protestors:

“I find the claims by some of my Republican colleagues that they are the vaunted defenders of free speech and the First Amendment laughable given the way they do business in the Capitol. They’ve gone on fishing expeditions with professors’ e-mails. They place arbitrary limits on the amount of time we can debate bills on the floor. They’ve so restricted expression in our galleries that people cannot even sit silently with small signs taped to their shirts. They routinely end public hearings while people are still waiting to testify. They hold floor votes on bills that have never had committee hearings. They tried to gut the open records law in their last budget.

“Now Republicans want to abrogate the UW’s existing free speech policy entirely in favor of a big-government, legislatively-mandated, ill-defined gag rule. Students could be accused of violating free speech rights and hauled before an Orwellian, kangaroo court based on allegations from any two people, who don’t even have to be students. Multiple offenses result in mandatory suspension or expulsion – a draconian penalty that isn’t currently imposed for any other violation, not even harassment, stalking, or rape.

“In Mc Carthyite fashion, the authors spoke of intimidation on campuses, but offered only anonymous, anecdotal evidence. They pointed to unruly protests at other

universities, but don't have any substantive examples from WI. The only case here they could cite was a speech by Ben Shapiro that was interrupted for about 5 - 7 minutes. Mr. Shapiro was then able to continue and gave his remarks in their entirety. UW - Madison decided that disruption didn't constitute a sanctionable offense. But some paternalistic members of the Republican caucus seem to think they know better than the university what discipline students deserve.

"But even this bill isn't extreme enough for some of my colleagues. One of the authors said students who organize protests should be punished. Not disruptive protests. Not violent protests. Apparently ANY kind of protest whatsoever. I think that speaks volumes about his true feelings regarding protecting the First Amendment and the freedom of speech. This is Big Brother at its worst.

"Are conservative speakers so fragile they need a cocoon of protection, where their ideas are never subject to criticism or protest, where they don't have to face how unpopular some of their beliefs might be with a wider audience, or how unsupported they are by the facts? With AB 299, Republicans now want to disrupt campuses and divide students the same way they've successfully polarized our communities and our country."