

# Rep. Berceau: Republicans besmirch Thompson's legacy to control campus speech

Posted on Friday, May 26, 2017

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State Representative Terese Berceau (D - Madison), the ranking Democratic member on the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities, released the following statement regarding the Tommy G. Thompson Center on Public Leadership included in the omnibus University of Wisconsin System motion approved by the Joint Committee on Finance yesterday:

“Governor Thompson, unlike our current governor, was an avid supporter of the UW System, especially the research conducted and its value as the economic engine of our state. Also in contrast to the current governor, he was a successful state leader who enjoyed the support of Republicans, Democrats, and Independents. It is right to honor him.

“It is not right, however, for today's crop of Republicans to use Governor Thompson's reputation to further their own narrow agenda. The Thompson Center was supposed to be funded with private money. At least that was the plan until Assembly Speaker Robin Vos realized he could use taxpayer money to dictate that there be more conservative speech at UW schools.

“That goal can easily be accomplished now. Student organizations have always been able to invite speakers - liberal or conservative - without using tax dollars. Conservative student groups like Young Americans for Freedom can bring in all the right-leaning lecturers they want, especially because they have funding from wealthy donors like the Koch brothers and Richard and Helen DeVos to pay the fees.

“Speaker Vos tried to claim the Thompson Center would be bi-partisan, but that assertion is belied by the make-up of the leadership board that would govern the Center. The majority of members would be selected by the governor from applicants recommended by the Republican Assembly speaker and Senate majority leader. That is clearly not in the spirit of the way Thompson governed.

“Chancellor Blank noted that one of the main principles guiding the Thompson Center would be ‘advancement of the Wisconsin Idea.’ I find that incredibly ironic, given that the governor and legislative Republicans tried to eliminate the Wisconsin Idea from the UW’s mission statement in the last budget.

“We don’t have enough money to fix our roads or fund our state parks, but apparently we have \$3 million so Republicans can micromanage and control speech on college campuses.”