

Rep. Taylor: Assembly GOP “first amendment” bill limits first amendment

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MADISON – Today, the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities is holding a public hearing on Assembly Bill 299 which attempts to censor and punish free speech and activism on UW campuses – under the guise of “protecting” the first amendment. Over the last several months, ALEC and conservative legislatures across the country have been advancing similar legislation to crack down on freedom of expression in higher education.

The timing of this legislation is particularly interesting given the recent crackdown by Assembly Republicans to silence Democrats. Just yesterday, the Republicans abruptly adjourned when legislative Democrats attempted to address coverage of pre-existing health conditions for Wisconsinites. Earlier in the week, Rep. Kathy Bernier (R-Chippewa Falls), Chair of the Assembly Committee on Campaigns and Elections instructed committee members that each committee member could only ask two questions per speaker at open public meetings, unless she grants permission for additional questions. Legislative Republicans have also amped up efforts this session to shut down debate using procedural motions when they believe a speaker is “off topic” or not germane.

Rep. Chris Taylor (D-Madison), who represents part of UW-Madison in the Assembly, released the following statement:

“Just like Donald Trump, the first amendment is only important to some of my Republican colleagues when it supports their own opinions. I have been extremely disturbed by the GOP’s previous behavior which at times has silenced the protected rights of Wisconsin’s citizens. They’ve fired DNR scientists they disagree with, threatened budget and staffing cuts for those with opposing views, imposed invasive and medically unnecessary procedures on women and banned discussion on issues like climate change.

“Creating a chilling effect around free speech is something that I truly believe none of us want. That being said, students who are exercising their first amendment rights should not be threatened with being kicked out of school. Some of the greatest cultural and societal changes in our country originated from peaceful political activism and protest. I will continue to stand up for the rights of all Wisconsinites, not just those with whom I agree.”

Rep. Taylor has been in communication with the bill’s author about her constitutional concerns with this legislation and is hoping that changes will be made to ensure everyone’s rights are protected.