

Mnookin calls self 'strong supporter' of free speech on campus; Vos calls appointment as Madison chancellor 'tragic mistake'

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Incoming UW-Madison Chancellor Jennifer Mnookin told reporters universities should "create spaces for ideas of all different kinds," including critical race theory.

GOP Assembly Speaker Robin Vos on Monday called on the Board of Regents to reconsider Mnookin's appointment, calling it a "blatantly partisan selection." One of his complaints about Mnookin was her support for critical race theory.

In a virtual press call yesterday, the UCLA Law School Dean introduced herself and fielded questions from reporters with UW System Board of Regents Vice President Karen Walsh. Walsh chaired the search committee that recommended Mnookin.

Mnookin said she is a "strong supporter" of free speech on campuses.

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"I think it's very important for all ideas to be able to be engaged with and thought about and part of how students and how faculty learn and come to develop their own views," Mnookin said.

Walsh told reporters academic freedom is one of the UW System's core beliefs. She said academic freedom means talking to people you don't necessarily agree with.

"[Mnookin] and I would like to invite Speaker Vos to lunch or coffee, whatever he would like to do. I have not met him yet. We're looking forward to it," said Walsh, an appointee of Gov. Tony Evers.

Walsh also said she doesn't take remarks very seriously from people like Vos and Sen. Steve Nass, R-Whitewater, criticizing Mnookin's selection. Nass, vice-chair of the Senate Committee on Universities on Technical Colleges, on Monday suggested the Legislature could limit the UW System's funding due to Mnookin's appointment.

"I would like for those folks to meet Chancellor Mnookin before they threaten our funding," Walsh said.

Vos tells WisPolitics.com he was open to meeting with Walsh and Mnookin but that he still opposes her appointment, labeling it a "tragic mistake."

"I'm sure she's a nice person, right? But being a nice person and having an ideology that doesn't fit with Wisconsin or the campus — those are two different things," the Rochester Republican said.

He said he doesn't expect the UW System to reverse the decision.

Responding to the fact that the Board of Regents voted unanimously to appoint Mnookin — including five appointees by former GOP Gov. Scott Walker — Vos said "groupthink" on the board is a challenge. Vos is a former student regent appointed by former Republican Gov. Tommy Thompson.

"If any of them would have done a simple Google search, they would have realized that what the ideology she's bringing into campus is exactly what we're fighting against," Vos said.

On her future relationship with the Republican-dominated Legislature, Mnookin called herself "a connector" and said her experience as a lawyer could be beneficial in her future role.

"Lawyers do have experience in talking across difference and in seeking common ground, and I will bring that approach and those values to this set of conversations, and I'm looking forward to it," Mnookin said.

PROFS, a nonprofit organization of UW-Madison faculty, in a statement yesterday praised Mnookin and called criticism from lawmakers "unfortunate."

"Dean Mnookin has expressed a willingness to work with legislators on both sides of the aisle, and PROFS is impressed that Dean Mnookin does not appear to be letting this unfair and unfounded criticism deter her from enthusiastically beginning her

new position,” the group wrote.

Mnookin will start her new role on Aug. 4. Current Chancellor Rebecca Blank will leave her post May 31, and UW-Madison Provost John Karl Scholz will serve as interim chancellor until Mnookin enters.

See PROFS’ statement [here](#).