

Rep. Stubbs: Decries UW System-GOP deal that would cut DEI

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MADISON, WI – Following reports that Republicans in the Wisconsin State Legislature have been negotiating a deal with the University of Wisconsin System to exchange Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) cuts for employee pay raises and funding for the Engineering Building project, Representative Shelia Stubbs (D-Madison) released the following statement:

“I was shocked and repulsed to discover that Republican legislators and officials from the University of Wisconsin System have been conducting closed-door negotiations to trade away DEI programming in order to negotiate employee pay raises and building funding. In a just world, we would never have to consider trading one for the other. DEI should not be a compromise.

As one of the representatives of UW’s Flagship University and a champion of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives in all arenas of life, from education to employment and from healthcare to housing, I am disgusted at this attempt to further erode the sense of safety and belonging our students of color have at our higher education institutions.

Wisconsin has long prided itself on a strong tradition of quality education and progressive values for the betterment of its citizens—the Wisconsin Idea is rooted in both of these elements. How can we now turn our backs on both of those ideals and decide that our BIPOC staff and students do not deserve the same sense of belonging on UW System campuses as their white counterparts?

By holding pay raises and much-needed funding for the Engineering Building hostage, the legislators orchestrating these deals have shown they value neither of these things. By making any legislative action on these items conditional to cutting

DEI programming, they have also shown they do not value our students of color and the structural barriers they face in not only pursuing a university education, but thriving in that pursuit.

The continued occurrence of racist incidents on our campuses, including one just last week that interrupted a UW-Madison student organization meeting with threats and bigoted statements directed at Arab and Asian students, starkly underline the continued need for DEI programming and supports throughout our University System.

The disparities facing people of color in Wisconsin, especially our Black residents, are dismal. Wisconsin is the worst place to raise a Black family, has the highest rates of Black infant mortality, and White households make more the double the income of Black households. We are home to the most segregated metropolitan area between Black and white residents. We have the highest Black imprisonment rate in the United States. All of these statistics serve to underline how critical the need for DEI is in our state.

These daunting disparities continue into the education of our young people. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, Wisconsin has the highest gap between high school graduation rates for white and Black students. We have the second-highest high school graduation rate for white students in the nation while having the seventh-lowest high graduation rate for Black students. Additionally, we are the state with the widest gap in reading and math scores between white and Black students.

Wisconsin remains dead last in the nation for racial equity in education, yet some members of our legislature continue to crusade against measures that would promote the success and well-being of our students of color. I will not allow Black and brown students and staff to be used as bargaining chips for funding the University needs. DEI provides us with a foundation to ensure all at our universities feel welcome and can thrive. In order to create a future where people of all backgrounds have truly equal access to opportunities through all walks of life, we need to dismantle and disrupt the policies and systems that create barriers for our marginalized community members.

Our higher education institutions are not a playground for politicians and their agendas. The welfare of our students and staff of color is not, and will never be, an acceptable sacrifice to achieve other policy goals. Our university students and staff

remain united against the threats to defund DEI because they acknowledge the harm it will pose to themselves, their coworkers, and their classmates.

In the words of writer and civil rights activist Audre Lorde, “It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences.”

I believe in DEI, I believe in our students, I believe in our staff and faculty, and I believe in a future where Wisconsin can rectify its profound racial disparities.”