

WPEC: Diversity is not a bargaining chip

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Statement by: Wisconsin Professional Employees Council Executive Committee, AFT Local 4848

In October, Wisconsin's State and University workers spoke out saying "Yes to Raises, Yes to DEI" in articles, petitions, and a rally. Just a few days later, the state's Joint Committee on Employment Relations met and approved the already-budgeted-for raises for state workers only. Robin Vos said then, as he continues to say now, that he won't move on raises for university workers unless and until the UW System further cuts its Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs.

State workers with the Wisconsin Professional Employees Council (American Federation of Teachers Local 4848) executive committee continue to say "Yes to Raises, Yes to DEI". We believe that conscious, deliberate efforts to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in our workplaces is a strength and is needed to recruit the best talent to public programs and to ensure a just society. It is essential that our workplaces are infused with the values of democracy in order to serve the public properly. Welcoming and supportive workplaces allow all workers to feel respected and thrive at their work. As public servants, we work with everyone across the state, and it is essential that all Wisconsin residents have access to the services and programs that they need. DEI initiatives, throughout the University System and across State Agencies, enable workers to succeed and residents to succeed.

We also know that DEI programs are a practical necessity. Right now, we are seeing the news about sexism, homophobia, and retaliation at the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' conservation warden program, which our union siblings in AFSCME are organizing to fix. DEI programs at our workplaces are a first step to

combating this sort of discrimination. We see attacks on DEI programs at the University System also to be attacks on the DEI programs at our workplaces within state agencies.

Pay for public sector employees is also far too low and has been for far too long. Years of no pay raises followed by less-than-inflation raises mean that our incomes are effectively decreasing with each additional year of work. This is bad for morale, bad for recruitment, and bad for retention. In turn, this hurts the services we provide to the public, to students, and to the state. The four percent wage increase is about half of what inflation was. It was already approved in the budget and has funds allocated for it. It is too little and already far too late, but is desperately needed by the university workers who were promised this in July.

The UW Board of Regents should reject this deal from the legislature that would trade away the valuable Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs, and the legislature should approve the wage increase for university employees with no more strings attached.