



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on December 14, 2023

Critics Assail Okla. Governor's Order Against Discrimination in Universities

Progressive legislators from the cities of Oklahoma's two premier universities — the University of Oklahoma in Norman, and Oklahoma State University in Stillwater — issued statements condemning Governor Kevin Stitt's executive order, issued Wednesday, curtailing the use of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in higher education. University of Oklahoma President Joseph Harroz joined them, issuing his own [statement](#) in which he expressed disappointment that the order "reaches into college campuses across Oklahoma and eliminates offices of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion."



AP Images
Kevin Stitt

Harroz further lamented, "While we are obligated to comply, the University of Oklahoma will always remain committed to its core principles that make OU a place of belonging where the American Dream is available to all." Then, presuming to speak for not only his university but all Oklahomans, he added, "We know, too, that our students, university community, and the citizens of Oklahoma also are resolute in their commitment to these values."

Representative Jared Deck, a Norman Democrat, was even more strident, arguing that Stitt's executive order was "an attack on first-generation students, students with disabilities, students who are veterans, international students, not to mention our countless students who are racially, culturally, religiously, and economically diverse." Similar remarks were made by other Democratic legislators (although the Oklahoma House of Representatives is overwhelmingly Republican, Democrats tend to dominate the university towns of Norman and Stillwater). Another Norman Democrat, Jacob Rosecrants, charged that Stitt "only listens to his far-right base."

Stillwater's Representative Trish Ranson even asserted that Stitt's order "illustrates the fact that he's not experienced true discrimination."

One wonders how Governor Stitt — or any governor in the United States — could issue such an executive order as is described by these left-wing opponents. Actually, Stitt's order is simply an effort to implement legislation that the Oklahoma Legislature had passed to combat such Marxist concepts as DEI and critical race theory (CRT). An examination of the order reveals that these Democrats are grossly distorting what Stitt actually said in his order.

The governor summarized his order as an effort to "encourage equal opportunity, rather than promising equal outcomes." To do this, he explained, means "Shifting focus away from exclusivity and discrimination, and toward opportunity and merit. We're taking politics out of education and focusing on preparing students for the workforce."

As one reads the actual executive order, it is difficult to understand how these opposition legislators are



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responding to it, as it is actually the opposite of what they are claiming it is. [The order requires](#) both state agencies and institutions for higher education to initiate a review of DEI positions, departments, activities, procedures, and programs to eliminate and dismiss non-critical personnel. “State agencies and institutions for higher education shall not utilize state funds, property, or resources to:

1. Grant or support diversity, equity, and inclusion positions, departments, activities, procedures, or programs to the extent they grant preferential treatment based on person’s particular race, color, sex, ethnicity, or national origin over another’s;
2. Mandate any person to participate in, listen to, or receive any education, training, activities, procedures, or programming to the extent such education, training, activity, or procedure grants preferences based on one person’s particular race, color, sex, ethnicity, or nation origin over another’s;
3. Mandate any person [to] swear, certify, or agree to any loyalty oath that favors or prefers on particular race, color, sex, ethnicity, or national origin over another;
4. Mandate any person to certify or declare agreement with, recognition of, or adherence to, any particular political, philosophical, religious, or other ideological viewpoint;
5. Mandate any applicant for employment [to] provide a diversity, equity, and inclusion statement or give any applicant for employment preferential consideration based on the provision of such a diversity, equity, and inclusion statement; or
6. Mandate any person to declare their pronouns.

Speaking in support of the executive order at the governor’s press conference was Patrice Onwuka, director of the Independent Women’s Forum’s Center for Economic Opportunity. “Race, ethnicity, gender, and heritage should not be used to discriminate against any person. Yet, discriminatory DEI programming has done damage on college campuses — fomenting division between students, eroding free speech rights, threatening academic freedom, and bloating school bureaucracies.”

She added that while “legal protections already outlaw race- and sex-based discrimination,” Governor Stitt’s “executive order guards against efforts to bypass those protections.”

David Safavian, general counsel for the American Conservative Union, explained why such an order is needed in a socially conservative state like Oklahoma. “For years, universities and government agencies, even those in red states, have become increasingly beholden to a coercive liberal agenda, often framed under the banner of DEI,” but Stitt’s action “abolishing DEI bureaucracies and ending mandatory ‘diversity’ training and DEI hiring statements will ensure Oklahoma’s institutions can focus on the diversity of ideas, rather than shame-based political activism.”

The truth of the matter is that the Left sees government bureaucracy — and especially the universities — as theirs, not the taxpayers’, and as institutions to use to promote their far-left agenda. DEI is *not* a grid to ensure academic excellence, diversity of ideas, or a positive economic impact on the economy. It is rather a tool to bully everyone — students, faculty members, applicants — into accepting their un-American philosophy, and Stitt should be commended for taking action against it.



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