

Testimony provided to the
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Health Care and Financial Services Subcommittee
Hearing on "Sacrificing Excellence for Ideology: The Real Cost of DEI"

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Enslaved Africans built The White House and the U.S. Capitol building.¹ They were not federal employees with salaries and benefits – they were slaves. Neither they nor family members of theirs in subsequent generations were rightly paid for that labor. Furthermore, our nation has not yet compensated African Americans for the brutality they endured for hundreds of years. For many of them, the real cost was their lives – they were terrorized, beaten, and murdered. Post-Emancipation, they were forced into separate and unequal schools, redlined and denied home loans, and systematically excluded from most well-paying professions. The real costs of this continue to reveal themselves through inequities in housing, wealth, and education. Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies and programs, in part, aim to right these and myriad other past and present wrongs.

Our nation has run up a cruel tab. Congress has never placed a ceiling on the debt it endlessly accumulates to African Americans, Indigenous peoples, and other communities of color. These diverse citizens persistently appear at the bottom of just about every health indicator and statistical metric of thriving, which comes at a real cost to them and to our country. Government and private sector investments into DEI efforts have never been anywhere close to covering the enormous sum of this unpaid, continuously accruing debt. The real cost of racial inequities far surpasses spending on DEI programs, positions, and professional learning experiences.

DEI as Debt Repayment, Not Divisive Ideology

America owes the women who have never received equal pay for their performance of equal work. It owes employees who were sexually harassed and abused in their workplaces, especially those who never received legal justice or financial remedies for their personal suffering and professional injuries. It owes extraordinarily talented servicemembers of color who were unfairly passed over for promotions in our nation's military; extraordinarily talented people with disabilities who never received the accommodations and support that would have enabled them to equitably advance in workplaces; and extraordinarily talented professionals

¹ National Archives. (2008, December 10). *Slaves built the White House and Capitol - see the records*. Washington, DC: The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration. <https://www.archives.gov/press/press-releases/2009/nrog-28-images>

who never got a real shot at earning their way to the top in companies and other workplace settings because of their weight, accent, last name, sexual orientation, or skin color.

DEI policies and programs aim to address these longstanding realities. Reducing them to “ideology” represents a consequential misrepresentation of the important work and the people who perform it. Opponents often critique DEI plans that they have not read; many make sweeping generalizations about experiences in which they have not participated. Here are eight common demonstrations of their illiteracy and dishonesty:

1. Opponents who have spent no or very little time with chief diversity officers and other DEI practitioners often accuse professionals in those roles of being divisive and discriminatory. They are not.
2. Without being able to define Marxism themselves, opponents claim that all DEI trainings are grounded in Marxism. They are not.
3. Without having read Ibram X. Kendi’s full body of work or analyzed curricula from defensibly large samples of DEI-focused professional learning experiences spanning a vast array of industries, opponents claim that all DEI trainings are based on Kendi’s philosophies and viewpoints. They are not.
4. Without being able to name three Critical Race Theorists or explain what CRT actually is, opponents claim that all DEI trainings are the same as CRT. They are not.
5. Without furnishing evaluation data or poll results from employees who participated, opponents claim that DEI trainings are universally low quality. They are not.
6. Opponents insist that DEI budgets and staffs are massive.² They are not.
7. Opponents assert that all DEI trainings place people into two groups: privileged and oppressed. They do not.
8. Opponents often reduce DEI to pronouns and gender identity. DEI policies and programs are so much more expansive.

² In an October 2024 *New York Times Magazine* article, investigative journalist Nicholas Confessore cited a Heritage Foundation Report (“Diversity University: DEI Bloat in the Academy”) that contended that too much spending and staffing are devoted to DEI activities in U.S. Higher Education. University of Michigan was the focus of Confessore’s article. In testimony submitted for a May 2025 U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and Workforce hearing, I noted that if Confessore’s unverified numerical interpretation was indeed accurate, the sum he reported “would have accounted for 0.2% of the University of Michigan’s entire \$13.4 billion operating budget.” *Truths About DEI on College Campuses: Evidence-Based Expert Responses to Politicized Misinformation* (Harper & Associates, 2024) was submitted to the Congressional Record for a March 2024 Committee on Education and Workforce hearing. During the hearing, Rep. Bob Good (R-VA) erroneously claimed that the University of Virginia employed 94 DEI officers at that time. The number was actually 55, which accounted for 0.5% of the University’s workforce. The \$5.8 million it spent on DEI that year was just 0.1% of UVA’s \$5.4 billion budget, I noted in the report.

It is beyond shameful and indeed undemocratic that policymakers know so little about the now dismantled programs and protections that helped organizations pursue and realize the moral and economic benefits of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Along with racial and partisan politics, anti-DEI ideologies have resulted in the enactment of state and federal policies that divide and exclude citizens.

Our nation's diversity is one of its most valuable assets. Dismantling the engines of stratification that disproportionately trap diverse peoples in poverty is not only beneficial to those populations, but it also benefits our country. Lawsuits for harassment, discrimination, and abuse are costly. These are avoidable expenses. DEI policies, professional learning experiences, and accountability systems help organizations save billions of dollars in unnecessary lawsuits and legal settlements. They also help put people to work and endeavor to ensure that middle-, senior-, and executive-level roles are comprised of a diverse array of extraordinarily talented leaders who deserve those opportunities, not just white people who have historically hoarded them. They aim to address the deeply problematic notion of "Black jobs" (low-paid, low-authority, low-security occupations to which African Americans are persistently routed).³

People produce better work when they feel included and know they have equitable opportunities to succeed based on the quality of their contributions.⁴ Conversely, encounters with racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, antisemitism, Islamophobia, and other forms of discrimination reduce the quality of their work – more alarmingly, it devalues them as humans. Their diminished capacity comes at a cost to them, to workplaces, and to the United States. DEI initiatives increase capacity and widen opportunity for Americans who have too long been systematically disadvantaged by unfairness and injustice. Several DEI opponents baselessly contend that it is white workers who are being routinely discriminated against. Workforce statistics prove otherwise.

Quantifying Demographic Truths

In July 2023, Republican Attorneys General of 13 states sent a joint letter to Fortune 100 CEOs that explicitly directed their corporations to avoid the use of racial preferences in hiring practices. "Racial discrimination in employment and contracting is all too common among Fortune 100 companies and other large businesses," the conservative AGs contended. They were right: racial discrimination is, in fact, far too common. It is just that the preponderance of evidence over decades show that it is Asian American, Black, Indigenous, and Latino citizens who are most often and most severely discriminated against. The AGs letter erroneously suggested discriminating against white people is the real problem. Here are just a few statistics that demonstrate the inaccuracy of that claim:

³ During a 2024 presidential debate, then-candidate Donald Trump explicitly declared that undocumented immigrants are taking "Black jobs."

⁴ McKinsey & Company. (2023, November). *Diversity matters even more*. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-matters-even-more-the-case-for-holistic-impact>

- 78% of K-12 school principals are white.⁵
- 72% of professionals in management roles at colleges and universities are white.⁶
- 87% of Fortune 500 and S&P 500 CEOs are white.⁷
- 84% of executive-level leaders at Fortune 100 companies are white.⁸
- 94% of U.S. governors are white.⁹
- 73% of the current U.S. Congress is comprised of white members.¹⁰
- All but one U.S. president has been white.

Additionally, demographic analyses conducted by the Council on Foreign Relations revealed the following: “While the officer corps has similar levels of racial diversity as the general population, those with higher ranks (generals in the Air Force, Army, and Marine Corps, and admirals in the Coast Guard and Navy) are disproportionately white. There is an even greater ethnic disparity in the top ranks.”¹¹

Noteworthy is that in every one of these sectors and professions, men comprise the overwhelming majority of white leaders. Put simply, there is insufficient evidence to confirm that highly qualified white Americans, especially men, are being routinely and systematically passed over for leadership roles in our nation’s workplaces on the basis of race. There is even less evidence that DEI policies and practices are responsible for racial discrimination against them. Such declarations are unsubstantiated and overstated – so too are claims about the financial resources and time invested into DEI activities.

Unsubstantiated Exaggerations About DEI

DEI opponents make assertions that are often, at best, based on anecdotes. They repeatedly neglect to substantiate their critiques with credible quantitative survey results; trustworthy qualitative insights from interviews with millions, thousands, or even hundreds of Americans; and rigorous thematic analyses of curricula, strategic plans, and other documents from the DEI programs that they are baselessly attacking. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth’s January 2025 Senate confirmation hearing is one compelling case example of this. Hegseth was repeatedly

⁵ United States Department of Education. (2022). *Number and percentage distribution of principals in public and private elementary and secondary schools, by selected characteristics*. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22_212.o8.asp

⁶ United States Department of Education. (2022). *Employees in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity, sex, employment status, control and level of institution, and primary occupation*. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22_314.40.asp

⁷ CristKolder Associates, (2005). *Volatility report 2024 America’s leading companies*. https://www.cristkolder.com/s/2024_Volatility_Report_Winter-FINAL.pdf

⁸ Heidrick & Struggles. (2023). *The composition of Fortune 100 executive teams*. <https://www.heidrick.com/-/media/heidrickcom/publications-and-reports/how-diverse-is-the-ceo-succession-pipeline-at-leading-companies.pdf>

⁹ Eagleton Institute of Politics, Center on the American Governor. (2025). *Fast facts about America’s governors*. <https://governors.rutgers.edu/fast-facts-about-americas-governors>

¹⁰ Manning, J. E. (2025). *Membership of the 119th Congress: A profile*. Congressional Research Service. <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R48535>

¹¹ Council on Foreign Relations. (2000, July 13). *Demographics of the U.S. military*. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/demographics-us-military>

questioned about his stance on DEI in our nation's armed services. He made clear that those initiatives will not be allowed under his leadership. In fact, he called them "poisonous."

Conservative senators offered similar appraisals at various junctures throughout the hearing. "In Biden's first year in office, the Department of Defense spent over five million man hours on 'counter extremism and diversity training,' what you and I might call woke training or DEI," said Senator Jim Banks (R-IN). "The Administration has refused to provide more recent data than that first year, but we know that it is exponentially more man hours wasted on DEI over the last four years." Banks did not disentangle counterextremism from DEI activities; they are not likely categorically the same. He also neglected to offer examples of what the curriculum included, what the learning goals were, or how participants assessed the appropriateness and goodness of those trainings.

Senator Jack Reed (D-RI), who serves as ranking member of the armed services committee, later pointed out that the estimated 5.9 million hours devoted to DEI were out of more than two billion hours the Defense Department devoted to all training activities within that same timeframe. If Reed and the *Military Times* source¹² he referenced during the hearing are accurate, that means that less than 0.3 percent of training time was devoted to learning about DEI.

Additionally, without supplying any findings from credible research studies showing causation, Senator Eric Schmitt (R-MO) claimed that DEI is negatively affecting military recruitment. He noted that in 2022, the Army fell short of its recruiting goal by over 1,500 soldiers, and the following year the Navy missed its target by more than 7,000. Schmitt did not say whether these shortages were based on analyses of survey results from high-probability prospective recruits who ultimately cited our military's allegedly 'too-woke' culture as a top reason for not ultimately enlisting. Despite this lack of evidence, Hegseth offered the following solution to addressing our nation's military recruitment challenges: "You have to tear out DEI and CRT initiatives, root and branch, out of institutions." The then-Defense Secretary nominee went on to say that he would "send a clear message that this is not a time for equity." It is essential for Hegseth and others to more deeply understand the real costs of inequity in our country.

Calculating the Real Costs of Eliminating DEI

Analyses presented in a highly-cited W.K. Kellogg Foundation report revealed that closing gaps in health, education, and employment would increase the 2050 GDP by \$8 trillion, "an amount greater than the current GDP of every country in the world except the U.S. and China."¹³ On their own, health disparities in the U.S. annually yield \$93 billion in excess medical costs and \$42 billion in lowered productivity, according to that same report. Additionally, the economic impact of shortened life spans among people of color is \$175 billion.

¹² Myers, M. (2023, April 10). Diversity: Necessary for readiness or the bogeyman? *Military Times*. <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2023/04/10/the-diversity-bogeyman-is-the-us-too-woke-to-wage-war>

¹³ Turner, A. (2018). *The business case for racial equity a strategy for growth*. Battle Creek, MI: W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Infant mortality, maternal mortality, diabetes, asthma, COVID-19, heart attacks, strokes, AIDS-related illnesses, and most forms of cancer disproportionately kill people of color in the U.S. For decades now, racialized health disparities have been routinely documented in highly respected peer-reviewed academic journals. These studies were made possible through grants from the National Institutes of Health and private funders like the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Smart, irrefutably credentialed expert scholars at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, top universities, and other trustworthy scientific enterprises have conducted this research.

Health equity initiatives are indeed DEI. They help narrow disparities and save lives. They also reduce the fiscal burden that health delivery costs put on our nation. An unacceptably high number of Americans die because of racialized medical malpractice. Last month, I testified in a House Education and Workforce Committee hearing in which another expert witness and multiple congresspersons insisted that DEI should have no place in our nation's medical schools. Sending doctors into their profession having learned too little about what causes racial disparities (including, but not limited to their own implicit biases) or knowing how to eradicate those inequities places them in the position to violate the oath they took to do no harm. More people of color will pay the cost with their lives. There will also be an unnecessarily significant cost to our economy.

Conclusion

Politicized efforts to dismantle DEI initiatives in K-12 schools, higher education institutions, state and federal government agencies, and corporations have occurred with increasing intensity since 2021. President Donald Trump signed multiple anti-DEI executive orders on his first day back in office. A few days later, federal employees who worked in DEI roles were fired; the programs and services they led were swiftly dismantled. Also, funding for most federal grants pertaining in any way to DEI were either paused or canceled. To be sure, scientists were not in labs, centers, and institutes engineering wokeness or divisiveness; they were in search of cures to racial, gender, and socioeconomic inequities. Canceling their grants and tearing down DEI just about every place else will not make our nation's racial, gender, and socioeconomic disparities magically disappear – it is guaranteed to worsen them and cost America lots more money. Scrubbing data from federal agency websites that make inequities transparent will surely do nothing to address those gaps – that, too, is guaranteed to widen disparities and cost America lots more money.