

Newsletter 32    DEI    Diversity, Equity and Inclusion    April 1, 2025

If there's any consolation for the recent unforgivable security breach of Pete Hegseth and the rest of the upper echelon of the administration, it seems to have taken some of the headlines away from the continuing dispute over DEI. Mr. Trump has been leading an attack on something originally intended as a cause for the common good and turning it into an issue used to further divide us. It should not have been difficult for him to issue an executive order not eliminating DEI programs, but rather having them written so as to preclude discrimination based on race. Let's first take a look at diversity, equity and inclusion in layman's terms

As Kali Holloway stated in her "Front Burner" column in *The Nation*, "DEI was always just an effort to ensure that qualified members of underrepresented groups had access to opportunities historically denied to them." Noting that Trump and Musk assert that white men succeed purely on "merit", she goes on to cite all the meritless white men appointed to top positions by Trump and unqualified white men following Musk's crusade.

I am particularly concerned with Donald Trump picking up on Pete Hegseth's comments using wokeness and DEI as the reason to fire General C. Q. Brown, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of staff. General Brown has a distinguished military career as a top aviator, commander of a fighter squadron and fighter wings, with 130 combat hours, and the Commander of US Air Force Central Command. Hegseth had complained that General Brown should be fired based on his woke policies of DEI, but he was out of line when he contradicted General

Brown's statement that diversity is the key to the strength of our armed forces, saying on the contrary that unity is the key. It's not on the contrary. Actually, the strength of the armed forces is demonstrated by their ability to unite in a common cause men and women from diverse backgrounds.

The end result --- we have replaced an extremely qualified Black male based on the claims of a mediocre at best White male ---figure that!

Of course, there are aspects of DEI programs that can result in reverse discrimination, but these can be overcome by carefully writing specific DEI programs to avoid , as the above mentioned Kali Holloway put it, "the consequences of unrestrained white mediocrity." Regardless, on the face of it aren't we all in favor of diversity, equity, and inclusion? I contend that we can achieve the positive intent of DEI, perhaps re-identifying it, that will satisfy both liberals and conservatives.

Most of us, myself included, struggle with the exact definitions of diversity, equity, and inclusion as they are intended to be used in DEI programs. The definitions used by the University of Virginia Department of Psychology on their website are quite clear , and I repeat each one in the following discussion.

"Diversity is the presence and acceptance of differences that may include race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, culture, citizenship, marital status, life and career paths, socioeconomic status, educational background, workplace position, language or dialect, (dis)ability, age, religious commitment, or political perspective." Remember that diversity is one of the basic foundations of my Step Forward America advocacy for national service. As I frequently repeat -- - "living, learning, and working together in school, training, and service, military or civilian, with others from diverse backgrounds, all youth will become more aware of our social, economic and political differences

and challenges.” We are surely the most diverse nation in the world, made up of immigrants or their descendants from hundreds of nations living here in rural, suburban and urban communities with a wide variety of social and economic conditions. Regardless, while we have made great strides in recent decades, all categories of this diversity are not being treated equally and thus do not have the equal outcomes for which some DEI programs seem to be aiming, or even the equal opportunities for which we all aim.

Regardless, we’d all be better off if the government would stay out of this conflict and get back to governing for the good of us all, addressing their role in diversity and leaving us to address our role. The main reason that all of us are not seeing equal outcomes, equal wealth for example, is still that all of us do not have equal opportunities, and this is due in great part to the lack of effective governing that would ensure adequate housing and education for all. Barely adequate projects still house people of color and other marginalized groups in urban areas. These are the same areas where limited local budgets result in poor school facilities, inadequate teaching staffs, and other attributes that would encourage adequate education. Then in suburban areas, especially wealthier towns, where adequate schooling is available, local zoning regulations and ordinances prohibit multi- family and other affordable dwellings. And now, adding to these handicaps, the government is withholding funding for Title IV grants and student loans, state funding for curriculum development, free or reduced lunch programs, and support for students with special needs, among others.

Now, let’s consider equity. “Equity... provides everyone with the unique resources and opportunities they need to reach an equal outcome. Whereas equality means providing equal access to everyone regardless of the differences in need, equity means recognizing that not everyone

starts from the same place, and thus adjustments are made to address this imbalance.” I would certainly hope that we all think we should be treated equally by our government, our institutions, our corporations and our neighbors. As far as I know, our Declaration of Independence still says that we are all “created equal.” Lauren Hirsch in her March 24<sup>th</sup> *New York Times* article “Attacks on D.E.I. Show No Sign of Abating” said that JP Morgan Chase seems to have the resolution --- change DEI to DOI --- the O for opportunity, ensuring that all are treated equally simply by ensuring opportunity in hiring and advancement --- while also ensuring that white males are not being discriminated against unfairly.

And finally Inclusion --- “Inclusion is the outcome of a welcoming environment that incorporates diverse perspectives and equitable practices to ensure all people participate in decision-making... the active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity to achieve a culture in which different people can come together to work, feel comfortable and confident to be themselves, and feel valued.” One of the first lessons that many of us were taught by our parents was to include contemporaries in our birthday parties and ball games, no matter how weak, shy, picked on and unpopular they were --- include them in our pond hockey games (I grew up north of Boston) no matter how poorly they skate. As we grew up, we realized how important it is to ask people sitting alone at any community function to join us --- essentially live by the golden rule. All of us individually, or in a social or business setting, have from time-to-time opportunities to continue this. Why shouldn’t our institutions encourage treating others with dignity within the institution when possible?

Another approach is suggested by Roland Fryer in his March 7 *Wall Street Journal* opinion piece “The Economics of DEI and Merit” in which he says that “DEI is dying. MEI [standing for ‘merit excellence and intelligence’] is the new corporate rage.... MEI involves hiring solely on

merit without consideration of demographic factors.” The lawyers can work out the wording so that it still has an end result avoiding discrimination against the traditional favored class. “A hiring approach that maximizes talent, and rewards performance is the antidote to bias.” Mr. Fryer claims that “in [his] work with corporations across America, [he’s] seen relatively small disparities in hiring and compensation for women or minorities.” On the other hand, he finds that “Racial disparities in promotions are more severe, with Black and Asian employees facing about a 20% penalty on average....” This can be addressed without bias in the other direction by utilizing “artificial intelligence machine learning [that] can estimate applicants’ likely performance or attrition before they are ever hired. These modern methods can identify future leaders,...and help companies estimate ...what type of applicants thrive in their specific company culture....Every American Corporation must do the hard work of putting the right people in the right jobs without letting bias get in the way,”

While we’re at it, it’s not only DEI that is under fire, but wokeness per se which we tend to forget is really a positive attribute. Shouldn’t we all --- especially the government that is supposed to be serving our needs, be “aware of and actively attentive to important societal facts and issues (especially issues of racial and social justice)?”

It will be a while before DEI ends its final journey through the courts.

A closing note --- Everyone, regardless of party affiliation, who is against defunding USAID and other humanitarian aid, domestic or foreign --- destroying the livelihood of tens of thousands of our public servants --- deporting non-criminal immigrants without due process --- siding with Mr. Putin in the war in Ukraine --- and destroying our relations with our closest friends and allies, Canada and Europe --- should be sure to attend an April 5 “Hands Off-Mass Mobilization” rally

near you. You don't have to support the overly progressive or woke stance of some of those who organized these protests.

And remember that the Constitution requires the President to "take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed."

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Step Forward America

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