

Don't Give Up On DEI

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The attack on Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) programs have caused some to back off of these efforts. However, DEI is a critical front in the fight with authoritarianism that should be fought for, not retreated from.

DEI is rooted in principles of fairness, good governance, and collective benefit rather than in identity politics or "special treatment," which is how opponents frame it to sow division. As such, DEI is a pillar of truly inclusive, pluralistic, and equitable democratic governance.

DEI is Critical to the Fundamental Purpose of Government: Just and Equitable Governance

- The role of government is to serve all people fairly and equitably—not just in theory, but in practice.
- DEI is not an affirmative action program, but a means to address inequities in governance, especially in terms of the relationship of governments to communities.
- Systemic disadvantages don't disappear just because explicit racism is no longer legal. If government doesn't account for those disadvantages, it will continue to function unfairly—not because public officials are necessarily racist, but because history has left different groups with different levels of access to power and resources.
- DEI ensures that government is aware of these disparities and actively works to create equal opportunities for all.

Example:

"If a town's emergency response plan is designed for people who own cars but never accounts for those who rely on public transit, the policy isn't racist in intent—but in

practice, it will disproportionately harm Black and Latino residents who are more likely to rely on public transportation. DEI ensures we notice these patterns and correct them so that government serves everyone fairly."

DEI Benefits Everyone, Not Just People of Color

- Racial equity leads to broader equity. Policies that address racial disparities also benefit rural white communities, religious minorities, people with disabilities, and political minorities.
- Stronger protections for marginalized groups mean stronger protections for all people. If we establish that government cannot ignore or exploit certain communities, it sets a precedent for protecting others as well.
- When we create policies that remove barriers for the most disadvantaged, we make society more just, efficient, and prosperous for everyone.

Example:

"When government listens to marginalized communities, it doesn't just help them—it helps us all. Think about curb cuts—originally designed for wheelchair users, but now useful for parents with strollers, delivery workers, and the elderly. DEI functions the same way—it helps those facing the greatest barriers, and in doing so, creates a system that works better for all of us."

Push Back Against the "Meritocracy" Myth Without Alienating People Who Value Hard Work

- Authoritarians frame DEI as "picking winners and losers" rather than ensuring fairness.
- This framing helps shift the conversation toward the reality that people start with different opportunities and obstacles so fairness requires acknowledging and addressing those disparities.
- It also reassures people who believe in meritocracy that DEI isn't about lowering standards or punishing one group to help another; it's about ensuring that talent and effort actually have a chance to succeed, regardless of background.

Example:

"If two kids are running a race, but one of them has to start 20 yards behind the other,

the kid who wins isn't necessarily more talented or hardworking. DEI is about making sure everyone starts from the same line, so success is based on ability and effort, not past discrimination."

DEI is a Guardrail Against Majority Rule Turning into Majority Tyranny

- One of the biggest misconceptions about democracy is that it simply means "majority rule." In reality, democracy also requires protecting the rights of minorities, whether racial, religious, or political, so that majorities can't impose their will unchecked.
- Without DEI, we risk a system where the majority ignores or steamrolls minority communities, not just racial minorities, but religious minorities, LGBTQ+ people, people with disabilities, and even political minorities.

Example:

"If we let majorities decide everything without considering the rights of minorities, then what happens when your group is the minority? Religious conservatives often worry about Christian persecution in a future where secularism grows. DEI principles protect them, too, just like they protect racial minorities today."

How to Use This Framing in Conversations

1. Start by Asking Questions

- "Do you think government should function fairly for all people?"
- "Do you think history still has an impact on people's opportunities today?"
- "Would you want a system where the majority could ignore you?"

2. Use Examples That Show Broad Benefits

- "Did you know that DEI helps rural white communities just like it helps Black and Latino ones?"
- "Wouldn't you want a government that recognizes the specific needs of different communities, including yours?"

3. Avoid Letting Reactionary Populists Define DEI as "Special Treatment"

- Instead, frame it as "smart governance" that helps America function better for everyone.

- DEI isn't about lowering the bar; it's about leveling the playing field so hard work and talent matter more than historical barriers.

Final Takeaway:

DEI isn't about race alone; it's about ensuring that government actually works for everyone and that democracy doesn't turn into tyranny of the majority. The real goal of the authoritarian attack on DEI isn't to make things fairer; it's to create justifications for effort to dismantle public agencies by suggesting that DEI has made them weak and ineffective.

When we fight for DEI, we're not just fighting for Black and Brown people. We're fighting for good government, economic growth, and protections for all minority communities, including the ones we ourselves might belong to.

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