

**NAACP**  
**LINCOLN and OMAHA BRANCHES**

Press Statement (Full Response)

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The shuttering of diversity and inclusion offices on the Lincoln and Omaha campuses of the University of Nebraska is a disappointing stain on the university and the state. However, it does not come as a surprise given the political discourse in our society and the fact that there is no black and no Latino representation on the NU Board of Regents. Also, there has never been a black permanent head coach in any sport at Nebraska.

At the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the chancellor has announced that the Office of Diversity and Inclusion will be closed and the position of Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Inclusion will be eliminated. At University of Nebraska at Omaha, the Office of Multicultural Affairs was eliminated last fall and the Gender and Sexuality Resource Center was closed this summer. These decisions take our university and our state backwards.

For many good-hearted citizens of Nebraska, this is an embarrassment. We all know that stoking racial division and resentment among some of our white citizens and pandering to their misguided fears and resentment of black people and people of other disenfranchised groups has long been used as a politically expedient tool. But we can do better in Nebraska. We must display the courage to do the right thing even when it is unpopular with some people whose fear, anger and resentment are misplaced.

Ending these offices sends a clear message. It is a confirmation to current and prospective students of color and their parents that too many of the people of Nebraska are only interested in young black men's and women's abilities to make

jump shots, score touchdowns or run sprints at a fast pace for the university. Nebraska is sending a clear message that the emotional and physical well-being of black, brown, LGBTQIA+ students, their parents, and university faculty and staff are of no concern to the NU Board of Regents, of no concern to Governor Jim Pillen, of no concern to state Senator Dave Murman and other like-minded elected leaders of the university and the state.

Nebraska is stating plainly to disenfranchised and underrepresented groups that their attendance or employment at the University of Nebraska may be met by state-sanctioned resentment and workplace hostility towards them.

Closing these offices moves our state further away from truth telling, reconciliation and racial solidarity even though most citizens of Nebraska want our state and nation to be "indivisible with liberty and justice for all." It is likely that most university employees believe in the importance of a diverse and inclusive educational experience. A diverse and inclusive educational experience better prepares students and trains faculty and staff for success in this increasingly diverse society and for successful interactions with the rest of the world.

We find that Nebraska's words and actions are not consistent. UNL's written core values and beliefs include this statement: "We value equity, inclusion, and dignity for all." The UNO core values state: "We create an environment that is welcoming, open, and diverse." However, you've now shut down key diversity and inclusion offices at UNL and UNO and eliminated Dr. Marco Barker's position as UNL Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Inclusion. So, your words ring hollow, and that's putting it nicely.

Evaluating the disbanding of these offices through an athletic lens, Nebraskans should be reminded that competitive recruiting and the transfer portal are real things. Black athletes and their parents are watching. Yes, it's true that NIL money will entice some athletes to play for and stay at the University of Nebraska. However, if the money being offered to prospective and current athletes by other schools is close to what is offered by Nebraska, then the scaling back of Nebraska's commitment to the well-being of underrepresented groups could play into the decisions of black athletes as to where to play and whether to transfer to a university that is more compassionate and more inclusive for all students.

It seems shortsighted to eliminate the Office of Diversity and Inclusion when Nebraska ranks last in the Big Ten for undergraduate diversity and is the only member of that athletic conference that does not belong to the prestigious Association of American Universities. Nebraska had 17.7 percent overall diversity percentage for undergraduates while the conference median was 24.7 percent, according to a September 8, 2021, Forbes Magazine article titled Diversity Gains at Big Ten Universities Don't Include Black Students. The elimination of UNL's Office of Diversity and Inclusion could affect the decisions of athletes, and also of prospective and current highly sought-after educators, graduate students and researchers as to whether the university is a preferred landing spot for their time, their talents and their families. Further, it's conceivable that scaling back the commitment to diversity and inclusion could ultimately impact our value and continued welcome in the Big Ten and result in a sizable revenue decrease.

These egregious decisions to disband diversity and inclusion offices are obviously the result of political pressure to turn back the hands of time on all of us. We believe that UNL Chancellor Rodney Bennett is acting on the wishes of Governor Pillen and other like-minded state senators and university regents. These actions are inconsistent with the university's stated beliefs. They violate the trust of many parents and students. They fail to protect and improve the well-being of all students, including black and brown students, women, LGBTQIA+ students, persons with disabilities and the faculty and staff at the University of Nebraska. While the Lincoln and Omaha Branches of the NAACP continue to value our relationship with the university, we will also be vigilant. We feel it is imperative that initiatives be urgently developed and implemented that will right these wrongs.

We urge the citizens of Nebraska to stand with us by taking a few minutes to email their NU regents, their state senators and Governor Jim Pillen to express displeasure with disbanding the two offices at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.