U.S. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon's remarks at the White House Roundtable, "Biased Professors, Woke Administrators, and the End of Free Inquiry on U.S. Campuses," on December 3, 2025:

It is an honor to be here today at the White House with this dedicated coalition of students, faculty, experts, and advocates for fairness and excellence in higher education.

We have more than 20 education-focused groups joining us this morning. This group is the best of the best when it comes to passion for education reform—particularly on the issue of woke ideology and the capture of our institutions of higher education. Together, we are setting out to solve a problem that has been decades in the making.

I know many of you sitting around this table have been fighting valiantly to restore our campuses to what they once were—places for the free exchange of ideas and truth-seeking. Thank you for all your work. I'm looking forward to hearing all your perspectives today.

The challenge before us is immense. Unfortunately, today's college classroom has become more a source of indoctrination and absurdity than of ideas or leaders who change the world. Universities have turned from their mission of preparing students for success in a free society toward "decolonizing" students' minds with progressive ideology.

Every college student—even at institutions where this crisis may seem less acute—has experienced it. There are entire news outlets, some represented in the room today, solely dedicated to reporting on it. Confidence in higher education has polled lower than 50% for several years running.

University leaders must make a purposeful choice between the two paths laid out before them. One path lifts education up to excellence and into a golden age of responsible citizenship, cultural elegance, and technological advancement. The other continues down the misguided road of discrimination, political radicalization, and the stultification necessary to silence those who resist.

Higher education's decline is not just a series of isolated events experienced by conservatives on campus. DEI—Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policies—have become essential to how many colleges define their mission. A study done just last year found that over two thirds (67%) of colleges in America require a passing grade in at least one DEI-related course to graduate.[1]

Colleges should prize free speech and inquiry—not adherence to a party line.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policies have turned universities from free markets of ideas to assembly lines of ideological conformity. The average American student faces relentless attacks in every aspect of their collegiate life if they disagree with DEI or any of the latest ideological fads.

In the pursuit of equity, academia has created new marginalized groups—often on the basis of quietly-held beliefs. A recent study done at Northwestern and the University of Michigan found that 88% of students admitted to pretending they held progressive views to score a better grade.[2]

Many students discover their own professors will berate them in class for their political and religious beliefs—and many administrators only enforce behavioral decency policies to protect students with the correct political or cultural views.

Progressive ideology creates more than just the threat of censorship. Recently, students have faced violence from "peaceful protesters"—particularly the antisemitic activists who turned campuses into battlegrounds after the October 7th terror attacks. Meanwhile, school administrators and faculty either stood by or actively joined the chaos.

The dualistic ideology behind DEI is responsible for all these troubling trends. Any worldview that divides human beings into two basic groups, oppressors and oppressed, is intended to justify treating individuals based on the color of their skin. This also teaches young people to make snap judgements based on crude race stereotypes. That is what is dividing our society.

Americans have woken up to this ideology and its lies. When the ideologues tried to extend the label of "oppressed" to those in denial of their gender and of basic biology—and threaten the privacy and safety of women and girls in our educational institutions—Americans said, no more.

President Trump was elected to put a stop to an ideology that has gone far beyond the expression of an opinion or viewpoint, and become a totalitarian, insatiable cult of lies. He appointed me Secretary of Education to end the pollution of our colleges and universities with divisive, extremist policies like DEI—and to refocus these institutions on intellectual curiosity and excellence.

When this Administration entered office, the Supreme Court had recently ruled that universities may no longer use DEI policies as cover for racial discrimination in admissions.

At the direction of President Trump's day-one executive order "*Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing*," we began by dissolving illegal DEI policies and grants within our own Department, and informing university leaders that all future federal funding would carry with it the expectation of compliance with this DEI-free directive.

On February 14th, the Department's Office for Civil Rights sent universities across the nation a Dear Colleague Letter outlining steps to restore fairness and meritocracy by complying with federal law on campuses nationwide.[3]

That guidance document is tied up in Court for now, but many universities have nonetheless respected the Supreme Court's holding. They shuttered diversity offices, eliminated positions that advanced discrimination, ended race-segregated graduations, returned to merit-based admissions and hiring, and in many cases, refocused their institutions on academic rigor and a better campus culture.

As of today, the Chronicle of Higher Education reports that more than 400 institutions in 47 states have made substantive changes to their DEI policy following issuance of our Dear Colleague Letter.

I commend every university that has fully complied; it takes courage to do what is right. By dismantling these burdensome and illegal administrative offices, universities across the country are saving hundreds of millions of dollars—but more importantly, they are freeing their students from living by lies.

But for some universities, the adulation of progressive opinion is more important than the success of their students. As they lawyer up and double down on DEI, their own students are entering the job market more prepared to talk about gender theory than to use their skills in the workplace.

Right now, more than half of college students who graduated in the last ten years do not work in a job that requires their degree.[4] If you are a university president or provost, a leader who has dedicated their life to the success of your students, shouldn't you want better for them?

Admittedly, the status quo is hard to change, especially considering the monoculture that dominates higher education. Many who want change still operate in fear that if they speak up, they will be marked as a traitor to the dominant ideology.

But deep down, many university leaders know they are failing their students and failing to live up to what their institution is supposed to be: a lighthouse, guiding students toward truth, despite the turbulence of public opinion.

That is why we are offering universities an off-ramp from the destructive path they have taken.

Our goal as a Department is to establish incentives for institutions that wish to restore fairness, academic rigor, and a culture of civil discourse.

We want to provide every opportunity for colleges to recommit themselves to principles like non-discrimination, open discourse and neutrality, financial responsibility, resisting foreign influence, and putting students first.

Many of these principles are already federal law, while others are ideals that should be the aspiration of every American educational institution.

Today, I call on higher education leaders to recognize the inherent good in a university system that reverses course from these decades of decline. And to join me in creating a golden age of academe—committed to reason, not racial preferences. Merit, not marginalizing the so-called "oppressor." Individual excellence, not ideological indoctrination.

Thank you for joining us. I look forward to hearing the perspectives of every brilliant mind in this room today—I know I can rely on your help in solving this crisis in higher education.