Vincent Munoz:

I think what we need to do is explain how our principles of free speech, free inquiry will help serve the cause of justice.

Betty Friendan:

The First Amendment, the constitutional freedom of speech and freedom of conscience that is the bulwark of our democracy.

Bettina Apthekar:

There was a passion in what was being said, affirming this [inaudible 00:00:27], what people considered a sacred constitutional right, freedom of speech and freedom of association.

Michelle Deutchman:

From the UC National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement, this is Speech Matters, a podcast about expression, engagement, and democratic learning in higher education. I'm Michelle Deutchman, the center's Executive Director and your host. In past episodes, we've discussed threats to higher education in the form of legislation aimed at prohibiting the teaching of specific ideas and theories, what many argue is the greatest threat to the academy since the McCarthy Era. Last episode's guest, American Historical Association Executive Director Jim Grossman, shared how these legislative assaults impact the way history is taught and learned.

Today, we explore the next phase of this legislative movement, which targets diversity, equity, and inclusion, DEI programs, offices and trainings. Across the country, Republican state lawmakers are passing bills to limit DEI programs at state-funded institutions, removing support services for millions of college students nationally. According to the Chronicle of Higher Education DEI Tracker, as of the recording of this episode, 84 bills of this nature have been introduced, and 12 have passed into law. States like Texas, Utah and Florida have banned DEI offices, leaving many professionals unemployed and students holding marginalized identities without support centers, while other states have focused on dismantling the use of diversity statements in hiring practices or preventing DEI trainings from being offered.

This trend is no longer limited to the states, as lawmakers and the House of Representatives have also introduced similar legislation. While this has had a devastating impact on many college and university communities, all hope is not lost. In a number of states where anti-DEI legislation has been introduced, bipartisan coalitions of legislators and a lack of support from the public has resulted in the 39 of the 84 bills introduced being vetoed, tabled, or failing to pass, in no small part because of the tireless work of advocates, including today's guest, Paulette Granberry Russell. Paulette is the President of the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education, or NADOHE.

NADOHE's vision is to, quote, "Lead higher education toward inclusive excellence and influence the transformation of organizations worldwide." It sets industry standard for relevant scholarship, exemplary standards of practice, meaningful professional development, and passionate community support. Before we dive into our discussion with Paulette, let's turn to class notes, a look at what's making headlines: On Wednesday, April 17th, the President of Columbia University, Minouche Shafik, reported to D.C. to testify before the House Committee on Education and the workforce about her campus's response to pro-Palestinian protests and allegations of antisemitism.

This is the same house committee which called the presidents of Harvard, UPenn, and MIT to testify back in December. Two of the three presidents that appeared before the committee have since resigned from their positions. Many have argued that these grillings by legislators are little more than opportunities for political showboating and don't serve to assist campuses with solving ongoing unrest with their

communities since October 7th. When President Shafik returned to Columbia's campus, she found that students had erected a Gaza solidarity encampment on the South Lawn.

After students refused to remove their tents, Shafik decided to call in the New York Police Department and more than 100 demonstrators were arrested. These arrests have drawn comparisons to Columbia University's 1968 response to students protesting against the Vietnam War and against the construction of an allegedly segregated gym in Morningside Park. Students occupied numerous university buildings and were ultimately arrested by New York City police. Since the NYPD cleared the tent encampment on Columbia's South Lawn two weeks ago, other tent encampments and protests have erupted at universities across the nation, including at New York University, Yale, Harvard, University of Texas at Austin, Emory, University of Arizona, University of Southern California, UCLA, and UC Berkeley.

Demonstrators are making a variety of demands, including calling for their institutions to cut any financial ties with Israel, conduct an academic boycott of Israeli scholars, centers, and universities, provide protesters with immunity from university sanctions or punishment, as well as showing solidarity with fellow protesters around the country. NPR reported the 300 additional protesters were arrested over this past weekend. TV news media was filled with troubling images of students, faculty, and community members being arrested. Free expression and academic freedom groups, including FIRE and AAUP, have issued statements condemning the use of force by police against the largely peaceful protests.

In spite of the arrests, the demonstrators at Columbia have reestablished their encampment. Administrators gave demonstrators a deadline of April 29th to leave the encampment or face suspension. When the deadline was not met, the university began suspending students. Protesters responded by taking over Hamilton Hall, a campus building. Overnight, similar escalations took place at other colleges, including Portland State University, where students took over a library and at Cal Poly in Humboldt, where protesters continued their week-long barricade of Siemens Hall. Graduation looms large, with college and universities anticipating disruption of ceremonies. In one case, USC has canceled its main stage graduation, which typically draws upwards of 60,000 people. This followed USC's controversial decision to strip a Muslim student of her speaking role as valedictorian. USC cited security concerns for both decisions. The next few weeks are sure to bring other controversies and challenges.

Now, back to today's guest, Paulette Granberry Russell has served as the President of NADOHE since March 2020, and is a leading national voice on issues related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in higher education and beyond. Granberry Russell retired in August 2020 from Michigan State University, MSU as a senior advisor to the President for Diversity Emerita.

During her more than two decades advising on diversity and inclusion efforts at MSU, she developed cutting-edge education and development programs, led campus climate surveys, monitored university efforts to increase diversity among students, faculty, and staff, coordinated community outreach efforts, and incentivized innovative DEI strategies through the offices, creating inclusive excellence grants. She received her BA degree from MSU and her juris doctor from Thomas M. Cooley Law School. Paulette, we are so grateful to you for joining us today to share your insights and expertise.

Paulette Granberry Russell:

Well, actually, it's my pleasure being able to join you in conversation today.

Michelle Deutchman:

So what I would love to do is start our conversation by talking a little bit about your career, if you could tell us how you found your way to DEI, especially at a time when it was not always front page news?

Paulette Granberry Russell:

Well, that's a question that I've been asked at different points in my career, and there's a way for me to simply answer that it's wired into me. I grew up during a time of upheaval, both in our country with respect to civil rights, I grew up with a family that migrated from the south to the north in search of opportunities for employment, as well as other forms of ways of providing for our family. I grew up knowing more about my own history, my own background, my own genealogy. My grandmother was raised by former enslaved people, and through her experiences and influence, I understood my responsibility both in the context of not only equal opportunity, equity, but social justice. So I always tell people I was hardwired for this.

I've always been an advocate. I've always been a person who displayed quite a bit of empathy, particularly for what we today might refer to as marginalized communities. I was always very committed to my own community as a Black woman, as a Black girl growing up in predominantly white environments. And so I just, based on my own passion, commitment, experiences, and expectations of family, this is how I got to doing this work. And quite honestly, that is what allowed me to be prepared when I was offered the position at Michigan State University in 1998, before these jobs were referred to as senior diversity officers or chief diversity officers.

So I was well prepared for this work, and what I found to be certainly challenging initially was becoming familiar with the traditions of the academy, but also I found that to be the most rewarding. I'm an individual who is a voracious reader. I am trained as a lawyer. Much of the work in the early years were around the compliance and regulatory area, but I always had a keen interest in increasing opportunities for marginalized folks, particularly in those days. It was mostly directed at race and gender. And so it was just a natural fit, and it has been for certainly the last, I would say, 30 plus years of my life, 22 of those at Michigan State.

Michelle Deutchman:

Thank you so much for sharing that. I really love to start our conversations by grounding us with where people's journeys began, because I think that that's such an important piece of this all. I think my next question is also going to pull on the thread of your experience over the last 30 years, which is sort of based on what you've seen over time, are you surprised that we've ended up where we are? And from your perspective, what are some factors that have contributed to us arriving at this very challenging juncture?

Paulette Granberry Russell:

Sure, and appreciate the question, especially for someone who has been in this work for at least close to 30 plus years, 22, as I mentioned earlier, in higher education. But it's also important having that experience, that grounding, being associated with this work for that period of time. I recognize, as I've shared with members of our organization, that these attacks that we're facing are not new. The attention is new, but we've faced these attacks privately for decades. They're just now being brought out to the public in a way that the work itself has become politicized. And I think as a result of that, we're getting the kind of very sharp focus on what is currently occurring in higher education. But we know, if we think historically, higher education, America was built to be exclusionary. It was not that long ago that women were not allowed access to some of the most elite colleges in the country.

1968 through '75, women were admitted to Princeton, Yale, Harvard, just to name a few. We also know that American higher education was initially built for the success of white people, white men in particular. Less than 6% of faculty at nonprofit institutions are Black, despite making up over 13% of the US population. We're still hearing announcements of first Black president, first woman president, first Latinx president. And again, I think these firsts show that we are not far from a past of mostly white, mostly male college campuses, and we can't overlook the history of our country.

And this particularly for me, as a Black woman, I would be remiss if I didn't point out that there were laws that made discrimination lawful for years, including throughout the Civil Rights Movement. We've

been working to eliminate barriers to these opportunities, and this resistance, of course, has its roots in the origins of attempts to create a more equitable country. So I think unfortunately, looking back, we took a lot of this for granted. We made a lot of assumptions that our work was understood by the broader audience, that we were doing the right thing, that we were having good outcomes, even though I often refer to them as incremental, but not necessarily by the standards of what others might consider good outcomes.

Michelle Deutchman:

Thank you. I think it is always important to look back in order to look ahead, especially because I think that, especially a lot of students in higher education right now, don't remember a time before this current moment, where things may not have been necessarily better, but they certainly were different. I am sure you are familiar with all of the various arguments and critiques that have been lobbed at DEI. People say it exceeds its mandate, it undermines academic freedom.

From my vantage point, it seems like DEI is being used as a scapegoat for all of the problems in higher education, but I think it's important to ask you how you answer some of these big critiques when people question the value of DEI to higher education. And I know you could probably spend a whole hour taking apart some of those arguments, but if you could just elucidate at least a couple of the ones that you think come up most frequently, I'd really appreciate it.

Paulette Granberry Russell:

Sure, and I think how do we answer the critics? We answer them with data, and this is, when I think historically about the development of our organization, it grew out of an understanding that evidence-based research was driving our understanding of the ways in which the inequities themselves, historically, but also present day, took place in the things that we need to do to mitigate those disparities, whether we're talking about racial inequities or disparities, gender, sexuality.

If we even think historically about individuals with disabilities, the LGBTQ+ community, it's evident that the notion that somehow this country was historically color blind, or gender blind, or sexuality blind just was not the case. So when I say that our work is evidence-based, research-driven, it's because of the importance of understanding specifically what the needs are of diverse students, our efforts to address distinct student needs to support both their academic and social success, and ensuring equitable access to opportunities that we know a college degree has proven to offer.

Right now we're hearing about the need for higher earnings, the need to reduce unemployment. We know that our efforts are intended to address those concerns. We have an entire journal that is a NADOHE journal, the Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, and it's full of studies demonstrating that there are powerful ways that the work of diversity professionals and administrators contributes to success of students. We're consistently aligned with the expectations that all students succeed.

And when we talk about all students, we mean all students. And we mean that in order for all students to succeed, we oftentimes have to be clear that not one size fits all. So I strongly support some of the issues that I think are occurring today that somehow diversity work is an absence of academic freedom, or infringes in different ways on speech and free speech. But what we'd like to point out is that what we do is complementary to all of that. You can't have academic freedom, you can't have free speech that is robust in the ways that it's intended if we don't acknowledge the differential needs based on diversity.

Michelle Deutchman:

Thanks, that's very helpful. And again, you're sort of anticipating where our conversation is going, because I do want to sort of take us down a few thousand feet from the 30,000-foot view to talk more specifically about NADOHE's work in this moment. And the battle [inaudible 00:18:19] value of DEI has become quite ugly and polarizing. And one of the things that we're seeing is that we're now finding many

DEI professionals are finding themselves not only without jobs, but actually being in states that are hostile to DEI. And I'm wondering if you can share a little bit about the role that NADOHE and some of your partner organizations are working to support those professionals in this moment of... I mean, I'm going to use the word crisis, because that's what I imagine it must feel like when the rug is pulled out from under you?

Paulette Granberry Russell:

Yeah, I mean, it is disheartening is probably mild, when I think about the impact that all of this is having, both the personal toll, which includes certainly individuals losing their jobs, or having their career sidelined, or being reorganized. We also know that it's having an impact on places where legislation hasn't necessarily been introduced or passed, but it's abundantly clear that it's having a chilling effect across the country, even, as I mentioned, in those states that are not currently subject to anti-diversity legislation.

We know that in conversations, and I want to go back to one of the points that you raised: How is this affecting individuals? And we can't separate individuals who have committed their lives and their careers to this work, who believe that their careers are being sidelined, but also the personal toll, because a good percentage of these individuals, based on our own data, are folks who come out of marginalized communities, including people of color, and women of color, and white women. But we also know that a disproportionate number of marginalized communities are being impacted, both through the loss of their job, but also programs that are intended to serve these communities.

The chilling effect is, I think, probably over-compliance with the legislation. We see that universities, that they're rushing to comply before they even know what the legislation entails, leaders remaining silent, and that's disappointing. We need leadership, especially presidents and CEOs not only in higher ed, but beyond higher ed, to stand up and speak out in support of the work. For those in states with proposed legislation, you have to read through the entire bill. And I think too often there's certain assumptions that are made that sometimes the legislation is written in ways that can be ambiguous, vague, and then sometimes, centers are being closed that perhaps wouldn't need to be. So that just gives you some of the sense of how frustrating all of this is, because the impact of some of the more draconian bills is felt and reverberates across not only those institutions, but across the country.

Michelle Deutchman:

So I'm going to pick up a little bit more on the chilling effect piece, because I think that is something that doesn't necessarily get enough attention. And I'm going to give a shout-out to scholar and center partner, Liliana Garces, who calls this phenomenon repressive legalism, this idea that you're going to over-correct either the legislation or just the possibility of it. And I think one example that I'm going to share is what happened with University of North Carolina's board of governors: So the board made this proposal to dismantle DEI offices, and programs, and policies, and they did that in spite of the fact that there hasn't even been any proposed legislation.

It was sort of anticipatory, I think, to sort of say to the legislature, "Don't worry, we're going to do your bidding without you even having to do it." And so I think one of my questions is what are steps that people can do to either prevent this chilling effect? Is this more about education, as you alluded to? Is this more about leaders speaking up? And if so, are those leaders administrative leaders, are they faculty leaders? What are some of the tangible things that you think folks should be doing, whether they're in states that have been chilled or states that need to support other states that are under these draconian pieces of legislation?

Paulette Granberry Russell:

Yeah, well, one of the things that I discovered, I just think about what the last year has been in terms of trying to better educate the media, mainstream media, higher ed media, in terms of what this work is

versus what it is not. Contrary to the ways in which I think some political leaders sloganize, I don't know if that's a word or not, but that's what I'm going to call it. They'll take the acronym, diversity, equity, and inclusion, and then say that DEI stands for discrimination, exclusion, and indoctrination. And the way to fight back against that is with the truth: Contrary to the ways that the work has been demonized, I think it is incumbent upon higher education as well as others, let's talk about outside as well, but people need to be able to better communicate the value of this work.

That was one of the reasons, very early on, NADOHE developed a communications guide. The communications guide was intended to debunk the myths, rebuke the lies, as I'm becoming now more inclined to call some of this ways in which they demonize the work, but also to point not only internally, but externally to broader audiences, what you lose if the goal is to dismantle diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education. I don't use the acronym any longer. I have to remind people that each letter represents something very different. And the strategies to, for example, in advanced diversity, is different than what necessarily is done to create a more equitable environment.

And those equities and the strategies developed in response to inequities is going to be tailored based on where we're discovering these inequities to exist. So it's helping people understand what we lose, but what we've gained, and to the extent that the belief is something is broken, then let's fix it. If the belief is that diversity, equity, and inclusion somehow shuts down free expression, freedom of speech, then let's point to the evidence in support of that. And if, in fact, that's true, believe me, I know that practitioners are fully capable of addressing that need. If the belief is that conservative voices have been shut out, shut down, then let's address that, as opposed to throwing the baby out with the bath water, as some have said.

Michelle Deutchman:

It's interesting, because what you keep reiterating is that you're going to be fighting back against what's happening with the best tools that are used in higher education, right? I mean, you've been talking about data-driven, evidence-based arguments, and this idea that truth will sort of rise above untruths, and those are things that are what higher education is all about.

Paulette Granberry Russell:

Yeah.

Michelle Deutchman:

Another thing it made me think about is that many universities, and University of California, I'm proud to say, has diversity as part of its mission. And so I think one of the things I wonder about is how can a university manage to fulfill its mission, if diversity is a part of that, without putting resources towards those goals? And I'm wondering if that's something that comes up, if you think people even know that their university systems have diversity in their missions, if they're committed to that? I don't know if you have any thoughts sort of around what I see as a cognitive dissonance between, "It's part of our mission, but now we're going to dismantle the pieces that would help fulfill that mission"?

Paulette Granberry Russell:

Well, and I think we cannot ignore the fact that the threat that has driven much of this is financial and political. And when you are a public institution, and resources are state-funded resources, and it becomes more readily apparent that that source of funding is threatened, then there are ways in which I feel confident when I say this, that as a result of the threat of lost funding, that the institutions themselves then begin to pull away from what they clearly have identified for perhaps almost as long as I've been in higher education, their mission, which is intended to support the success of all students, but also recognizing the history in this country that led to differential outcomes, whether those are graduation rates, whether that is access to certain majors that might help drive the economy of this country, particularly STEM.

If I think about science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and the fact that we know we need all hands on deck these days with respect to technology and sciences. And so it's interesting that we find ourselves in a position where institutions, I believe, are compromising their mission, and they're compromising it through the dismantling of offices that are intended to allow them to arrive at that place that best represents the success of all students.

I speak oftentimes and remind individuals, as well as media and those outside higher education, that if we think about this in the context of the three targeted areas that's more frequently mentioned in the legislation, certainly over the last year, the targets are race, gender, and sexuality. Okay, they've done the carve-outs for veterans, first-gen, Pell-eligible, people with disabilities. Those are preserved, but the three targeted identities are the ones that I mentioned. And what is that all about? And I have to remind folks what has been conjured up in order to then draw support from among those that are in a position to pass the legislation. And so at some point, I think we have to be clear about what is motivating some of this.

Michelle Deutchman:

Well, and these categories that you just mentioned, I mean, these are the same categories that are also the targets of book banning that we've seen around the country. So it's a theme about particular ideas and identities, same thing, critical race theory, a lot about teaching, history and classrooms. So it's a theme that is crossing across a lot of different boundaries.

Paulette Granberry Russell:

Yes, it's fear-mongering, and it's worse, it's race baiting. It is demonizing individuals within the LGBT community, particularly trans and non-binary. It's being purposely created, those who would want the general population to believe that somehow undeserving individuals are taking something from them. And you don't have to go too far back to understand what all of that is intended to do.

Michelle Deutchman:

Of course. I mean, it's framing it as some kind of zero-sum game-

Paulette Granberry Russell:

That's right.

Michelle Deutchman:

... rather than what you're talking about, which is just ultimately trying to enhance the experience for all students, right?

Paulette Granberry Russell:

That's right.

Michelle Deutchman:

And I want to dive in a little more about students, because I do think a lot of the coverage of this, rightfully so, is about the impact of laws, and dismantling of offices, and people losing jobs. But I would love to have you talk a little more about how this legislation is impacting the experience attending college, especially from students from marginalized groups. And obviously, every campus is different, some campus, that's losing LGBT centers, it's either renaming or eliminating other diversity-related centers. But if you could just talk or maybe paint a little bit more of that landscape to the extent that you can?

Paulette Granberry Russell:

Sure. If we think about interest in majors that include gender studies, queer studies, Black/Latino studies, it is limiting opportunities for students to pursue their own educational goals that can be very diverse in interest. It's attacking, as we mentioned earlier, offices. We are returning to a time when historically marginalized students faced extraordinary barriers to earning their degrees. So we take away, for example, some of our potential pre-college programs that are intended to introduce girls to engineering, as one example.

It's not to exclude boys or men from engineering, but it's expanding the reach and the understanding that this is a possibility for you. It is also dismantling a full range of educational experiences, and we recognize that we'll all be worse off if students can't reach their full potential, meaning the academic support programs, the social support programs that are open to all, but certainly are there to enhance the experiences of marginalized communities and students. And it's not to say that others are not invited to participate. In fact, are encouraged to participate, because you gain an understanding of what it means to engage across cultures. And these things don't always happen naturally, okay? Some of the best work in higher education is the way that we intentionally design interventions, programming, strategies that increase these dialogues and experiences across cultures.

And it's not mandating that these things happen. It's not indoctrinating students in the way that it's being framed, but it is building opportunities for students to engage with each other, to learn from each other. Those things happen in the classroom. If you've got faculty who expect students to work in teams, sometimes it's being attentive to who's sitting together and who's not, and how do you encourage this, experiences for students to understand students from other countries, students from different backgrounds, geographies, etc? So these attacks are cutting off our ability to create campus spaces that address hate, help students find a sense of belonging, community, and safety.

Michelle Deutchman:

Thank you, I thought some of those specific examples were really helpful. I mean, we can't have a discussion about all of these issues without talking about its impact on democracy writ large, but also what's kind of coming up fast and furiously, which is the election in November. And so I'm wondering if you have any thoughts about how DEI and this backlash against DEI, how it might play out in the run-up to this historic election? And you certainly should feel free to add in things that people might anticipate, and we're going to get to that at the end, towards of what are efforts or small steps people can be taking as they think about how these different issues, politics, polarization, DEI, and then this election sort of intersect with one another?

Paulette Granberry Russell:

Yeah, and I know I've emphasized the political aspect of all of this, and I do, as I mentioned a bit earlier, I do think that this is politics at the expense of students, and it isn't only about higher education. We know this is playing out outside higher education, whether it's K through 12, we know that these attacks are now being leveled against supplier diversity efforts in corporate settings. We know that we're now hearing more about corporations and for-profits beginning to pull back from their own commitments to this work.

This is about running interference, and the ability for anyone to be who and what they want to be. At the end of the day, when you think and you reflect back on why particular targets, I think this is intended to limit opportunities. They're leading to censorship, as you mentioned when we talk about book banning, when we talk about gag orders for faculty, and we know that it's affecting what students themselves can learn. I think, increasingly, you're hearing more about the concerns that we have regarding our democracy, and we recognize or should recognize that an effective democracy means that everyone can participate.

So if we're interfering with students' abilities to have equitable access to education, access to curriculum, access to programming that might otherwise expand their understanding of differences, then you are interfering with their ability to participate in democracy. Again, I go back to the acronym, it's being weaponized, it's being used to pit people against one another, which is the exact opposite of its goal.

Michelle Deutchman:

Thank you. The stakes feel so high to me on all of these different issues as we see all the protests on unfolding on campuses, as we near the end of the year, as we see legislative sessions wrapping up, with Iowa sort of slipping in its own ban at the end of the year, and we all sort of have to find the energy, right, to keep on keeping over the summer and as we enter new legislative sessions, and then of course prepare for the election. I don't know if there's a particular strategy? Do you think that NADOHE and others who are really working to oppose this type of legislation, do you have any thoughts on what steps you might be taking? Are they going to be different, moving forward into the fall?

Paulette Granberry Russell:

Well, first and foremost, we have to support our membership. And that requires, on some level, we have to allow them an opportunity to speak about their concerns. Some of those concerns is increasingly around navigating in a new environment, and that includes an expectation that they contribute to how the future of this work is going to look in higher education. And it's a moving target right now, unfortunately. Because of the way the legislation is being written, some aspects I often refer to... There's four pillars of the legislation, and the one that's particularly concerning, not that the others aren't, but it's the dismantling of what they call DEI bureaucracies, which includes offices, and understanding that this work is well integrated throughout our institutions.

So it's not just a central office that is typically directed by individuals, for example, who are chief diversity officers. But this is, to the extent that over time, the goal was for the institution itself to embrace its mission and the strategy, so it is frightening. Okay, so helping our people and our membership is uppermost in our mind, but it also means that we are investing quite a bit of effort and energy in educating not only internally and giving our... Coalitions are beginning to form around this, and we understand the necessity of working across sectors, both in education, but also outside education. So we're doing more to arm broader audiences and allies, if you will, with an understanding of what is happening here in higher education, and understanding that it may not limit itself to just higher education.

And we know that there are others who care about this work. And so what we're trying to do is empower, through some of our grassroots efforts, to say, "You can't sit on the sidelines and expect that somehow you won't be impacted, because we all will be." And so we need others to begin to understand the misinformation that's out there, and we're giving them the tools to be able to understand that. And increasingly, we have more, whether they are within higher ed and outside higher ed, who are saying, "Hey, we see what's going on. What can we do to be more helpful?" So part of where we're investing quite a bit of our time also, so it's working internally and externally. There's a lot ahead of us. This has been nonstop, and as some of us have pointed out, those who have been orchestrating this effort have been at it for some time now. And I go back to my earlier statement that perhaps thinking that we were doing the right thing somehow would preserve the future of the work, and we know now that's not the case.

Michelle Deutchman:

Well, I think we're going to end on this note, and I'm going to key into empowerment, because I want to try to feel hopeful, and I am hopeful that at least many of the people who are hopefully listening to our conversation will feel empowered to do something after listening. And whether that is a small thing, like

you said, it's reading a bill all the way through, or whether it's just realizing that, like you said, this is not something that it's only going to affect certain offices on campuses, in certain states.

This has the potential to really affect all of us in higher education, even those of us who are in staunchly blue states. And so my hope is that people will feel motivated to learn more and do a little bit more as we move ahead. And I guess I think, in addition to just thanking you for spending your time and sharing about your journey and about the work of NADOHE, is there anything else you want to sort of share with our listeners before we close?

Paulette Granberry Russell:

Sure, and I think this is a good way to just kind round it out so that folks understand the significance of what we have, both in terms of the benefits of what we have, but also what we lose: We know diversity, equity, and inclusion is important in terms of business success. We know that the future of scientific advancement, national security, academic freedom, and civic engagement is potentially negatively impacted if we don't understand and do what we can do to preserve the needs of a diverse student body.

I want folks to not sit silent on the sidelines. We need individuals to advocate for the work, learn more about it, not buy into the fear-mongering that has been generated, share our resources from NADOHE's website, and type in "navigating legislation". We've made that information available to anyone who's interested, and support the diversity professionals on our campuses and those doing the work. Right now, I think it would be meaningful for them to know that they're not in this by themselves, and trust that there are individuals who remain optimistic, who remain committed, and are joining forces with others to preserve the gains that we've made and enhance the future of higher education.

Michelle Deutchman:

Paulette, I've always been an admirer of you in your work, more so even now. Thank you again. I hope all of our listeners will, at a minimum, drop a note to some of the DEI professionals at your institution or in your world.

Paulette Granberry Russell:

Thank you, that would be very much appreciated and welcomed.

Michelle Deutchman:

Well, that's a wrap. Thanks again to Paulette Granberry Russell for joining us. Thank you to everyone who attended the center's sixth Annual Speech Matters Conference this month. For those who were unable to attend, the recordings of our sessions will be posted later this week. Next month, we'll be joined by Robert Cohen, a professor of history and social studies at NYU's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. Cohen, a former center fellow, is the foremost expert on Mario Savio and the Free Speech Movement. We'll talk about the protest movements of the 1960s and of today. Talk to you then.