

To: The University Senate
From: Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee
Subject: PNW Chancellor Thomas Keon's Racist Comments
Disposition: University Senate for Discussion and Adoption

Rationale: Chancellor Thomas Keon engaged in racially charged behavior when he mocked Asian language at the Purdue Northwest (PNW) 2022 Winter Commencement. His performance humiliated and dehumanized Asian Americans and Asians, and tarnished Purdue's global reputation. An [editorial](#) written by a Purdue Faculty Member published in the Purdue Exponent ("Why the PNW Chancellor's Words Matter" by Xiang Zhou, 21 December 2022) as well as an [open letter](#) from members of Purdue Asian American and Asian faculty and staff, explains the gravity of this behavior particularly as it impacts our Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) faculty and students. The Purdue Board of Trustees' and Keon's inadequate response to the outrage his actions produced has led to national and international indignation. For instance:

- A [statement of condemnation](#) has been signed by 1,000 scholars from hundreds of U.S. universities
- Over 9,400 people have signed a [student-initiated petition](#) calling for Keon's resignation
- Dozens of statements and public demands for his removal have been released by Asian American, Black, LGBTQ, and many other communities
- The Urban League [has removed him from its board](#), and other organizations are pondering whether to do so
- 87% of PNW faculty have voted "[no confidence](#)"

At Purdue West Lafayette, we are over 25% AAPI, and a mere reprimand of Chancellor Keon's behavior suggests that demeaning humor, which has historically been used as a tool of oppression and subjugation, is tolerable. We agree with the 87% of PNW faculty who voted no confidence, and call on the Trustees of Purdue University to act resolutely to restore confidence in leadership within the Purdue University System by removing Thomas Keon from leadership.

Proposal: The Faculty Senate condemns Chancellor Thomas Keon’s actions at the commencement, and his failure of leadership since that time, and calls for his resignation. If that resignation is not immediately forthcoming, the Purdue Faculty Senate asks the Board of Trustees to remove Keon from his position as Chancellor of PNW. Given the gravity of the unacceptable behavior by Keon, this is for the good of Purdue. Further, and most importantly, this would demonstrate Purdue’s support for diversity, equity, and inclusion, and the need for a leader who has the confidence of the university community, including its faculty. Failure to do so would send the opposite message.

Committee Votes:

For:

Faculty

Peter Bermel
Ximena Bernal (vice chair)
Brian Dilkes
Neil Knobloch
Brian Leung
Oana Malis
Rose Mason
Terrence Meyer
Gustavo Rodriguez-Rivera
Kevin Stainback
Denise Whitford (chair)

Students

Gabriela DaSilva

Advisors

Lowell Kane

Against:

N/A

Abstained:

N/A

Absent:

Faculty

Josh Mariani
Lisa Mauer
Li Qiao
Ariana Torres-Bravo
Solita Wilson

Students

Josh Mariani
Solita Wilson

Advisors

Kris Wong Davis
Lisa Mauer
Alysa Rollock