

The absurdity of Dan Patrick self-appointed Texas thought police

By Rogelio Sáenz,
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Dan Patrick, the former conservative radio talk-show host-turned-Texas lieutenant governor, has morphed into the state's thought police. Seventy-two years ago, Wisconsin Republican U.S. Sen. Joseph McCarthy did the same by targeting political scorn on those he labeled "subversive communists."

Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick is in a huff

He vehemently brays that he has had enough

High schools teaching critical race theory made him extremely gruff

Now college professors who poison minds will make him truly tough

One of the most often-cited quotations of Karl Marx is a riff on the philosopher G.W.F. Hegel. In the mid-19th century, Marx wrote that history repeats itself "the first time tragedy, the second time farce."

Flash forward to the Great Farce in 2022 as Patrick aims his political contempt on professors who teach critical race theory, or CRT, and have the audacity to make Texas look bad for its subjugating, exploiting and killing of people of color and, in the process, making the white students of today uncomfortable. Never mind that Patrick has no sense of what CRT is and that for centuries Texas educators have made students of color extremely uncomfortable with glorified tales of white supremacy that erase their histories and contributions.

Patrick seeks to promote the atrophy of minds throughout the educational system. This emphasis on uncritical, unreflective and ahistorical thinking is what keeps the likes of Patrick in power. Not surprisingly, Texas has been ranked nationally at the bottom in political participation and civic engagement.

As demographic forces catch up to Texas Republicans — with Latinos projected to outnumber whites this year — the Republicans' political machinations have escalated to demonize high school teachers and professors accused of teaching CRT. It does not matter that Patrick and Gov. Greg Abbott are ignorant about CRT; they use it to get conservative white voters to keep Republicans in power.

Now for tenure, which Patrick seeks to kill in the upcoming Texas legislative season. As many observers, including the Express-News Editorial Board, have stressed, Patrick's threat

to eliminate tenure for new faculty at Texas public colleges and universities, and get rid of tenured faculty who teach CRT, is inappropriate and is why tenure exists in the first place.

Think about the consequences of getting rid of tenure at public universities in Texas. The best and brightest faculty will avoid coming to Texas. Patrick, Abbott and Attorney General Ken Paxton already have established the state as hostile territory for people with progressive politics. And top universities around the country will raid the state's top professors. A long line of scholars in Texas will be applying for jobs outside of Texas, where they would be treated with professional dignity and respect and their tenure would be honored.

Patrick, the self-appointed thought police, has devised a ludicrous plan. The Texas economy that is the pride of the state's business community depends heavily on intellectual talent in our colleges and universities.

Where to begin on Patrick's inanity? My tía Marta, a very wise woman who lives in the state of Coahuila in Mexico, has a succinct phrase to describe absurdity: "*¡Que babosada!*" or "what a bunch of drool!"

Despite its absurdity, Patrick's attack on tenure cannot be easily dismissed. In the current political climate, inanity and farce play big among many Republicans, especially in Texas. Republicans have used scare tactics to establish draconian voter suppression and abortion laws, and to advance cultural wars against CRT, transgender children and women. They went after public schools first and now increasingly zoom in on higher education. Faculty and our allies need to push back strongly and call out the absurdity of Patrick's plan.

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Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick is no thought police; he seeks to promote uncritical, unreflective, and ahistorical minds throughout the educational system. Jay Janner /Associated Press