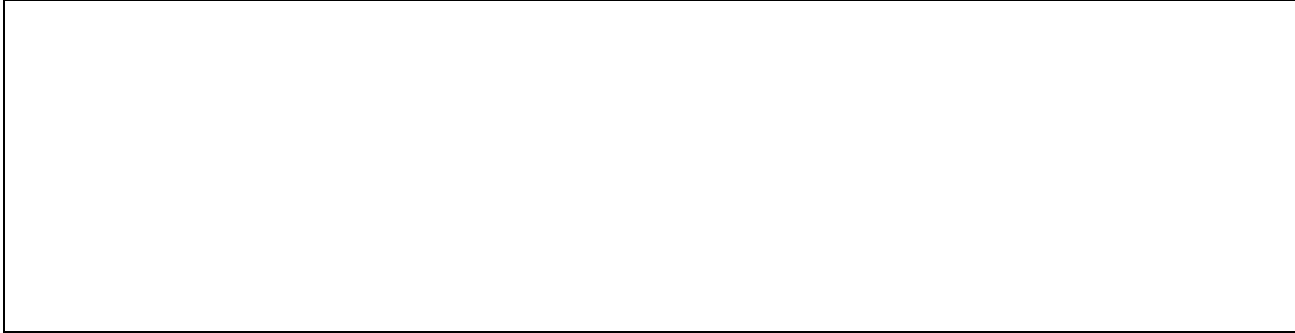


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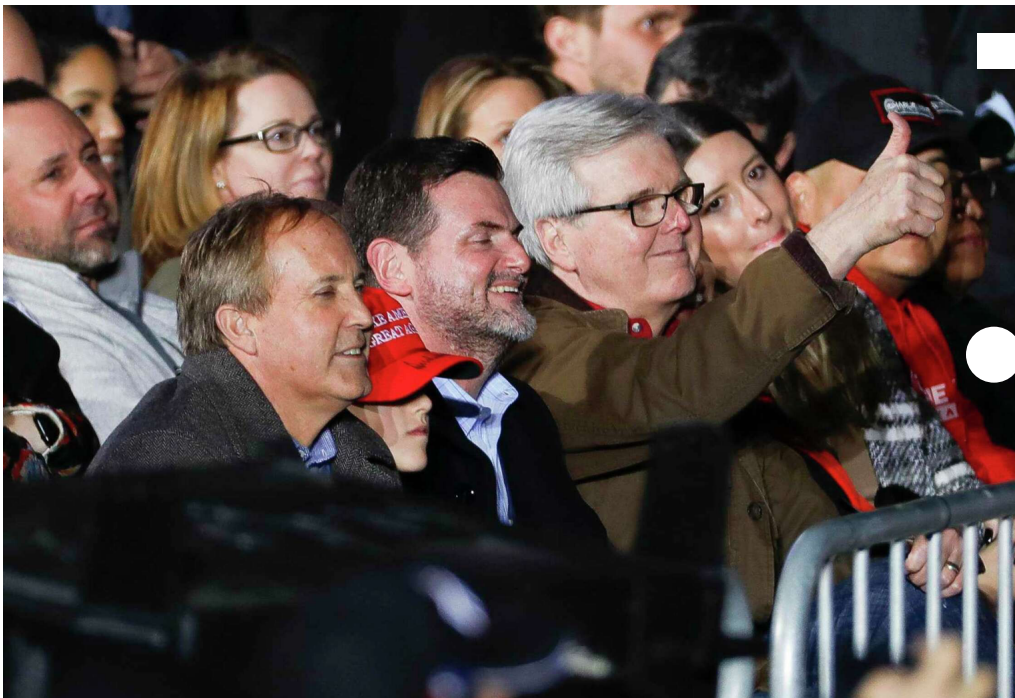
BUSINESS // CHRIS TOMLINSON

# Texas bills banning diversity programs to protect white privilege will damage the state's economy



Chris Tomlinson, Columnist

April 24, 2023



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Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, right, gives a thumbs-up after former President Donald Trump mentions him beside State Sen. Brandon Creighton and Attorney Gen. Ken Paxton at a Save America Rally, Saturday, Jan. 29, 2022, in Conroe.  
Jason Fochtman, Houston Chronicle / Staff photographer

Every manager knows you cannot improve what you do not measure.

For example, do sales produce expected revenue? Good managers collect and analyze available data, establish a baseline with goals and then monitor progress.

When it comes to correcting generations of discrimination, inequity and exclusion, though, Texas Republicans think historical injustices will fix themselves. Gov. Greg Abbott and Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick are pushing Senate Bill 17 and other bills to make programs intended to correct past wrongs illegal.

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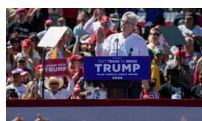
They don't care that a ban on diversity, equity and inclusion efforts, known as DEI, will drive away private investments in higher education and disqualify the state for federal programs worth billions.

When companies pay the fee to join the University of Texas at Austin's Energy Institute, DEI programs for students and faculty are among their top concerns, institute director Brian Korgel told me. Federal and private grant applications always have DEI sections.

"Companies expect us as universities to play a role in terms of fostering the diversity of the student body, both in admissions and in terms of graduation and retention," he said. "For a single investigator applying for a science grant from the National Science Foundation, you really need to address diversity in some way in your proposal; otherwise, it becomes a real challenge to get the work funded."

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The Energy Institute has joined the Center for Houston’s Future, Exxon, Sempra and other companies to apply for a Department of Energy grant to build a hydrogen hub along the Gulf Coast. But the application asks about DEI efforts. The Legislature’s anti-DEI laws imperil that application.

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Patrick and state Sen. Brandon Creighton, a Houston-area Republican and SB 17’s author, say they want diversity. They simply oppose efforts to measure it, understand the barriers to it, or do something about it. They argue that any attempt to improve diversity and deliver a student body and workforce reflective of the population discriminates against white people.

Reactionaries uncomfortable with delivering an equitable society have made this argument since 1865.

Following the Civil War, northern Republicans knew ending slavery was not enough. They started the original Black Lives Matter movement by funding the Freedmen's Bureau and other programs to guarantee equal rights for formerly enslaved people.

Southern Democrats responded by creating militias to terrorize and suppress Blacks; the most famous was the Ku Klux Klan. Northern politicians abandoned their efforts a few years later in return for a political deal, something [University of Texas history professor Jeremi Suri explores in his recent book, "Civil War by Other Means: America's Long and Unfinished Fight for Democracy."](#)

When Blacks progressed in the early 1900s, Southern whites mobilized the Klan again and passed Jim Crow laws to institutionalize racism. After the civil rights movement scored successes in the 1950s and 1960s, [President Ronald Reagan rolled back regulations intended to correct 350 years of discrimination.](#)

In the last decade, following the election of the first African American president and the Black Lives Matter protests, [a renewed movement to protect white privilege is attacking DEI programs](#) that seek only to deliver the Constitution's promise of equality.

"Donald Trump and QAnon are twenty-first-century replays of (impeached former post-Civil War president) Andrew Johnson and the Ku Klux Klan – red hats this time born of older white hoods," Suri writes in his book. "History allows us to map the intricate roots buried in the soil, to understand how they were planted, and to appreciate how they have sprouted today."

Patrick and Creighton attended a Trump rally in Houston with Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton and are superfans. But Suri can reach such conclusions without fear of political retribution thanks to the principle of academic freedom and tenure.

Abbott, Patrick, Creighton and their GOP allies intend to end those too.

Professors who violate SB 17 can be placed on unpaid leave and fired, while universities will lose state funding and face \$1 million fines. Creighton's [Senate Bill 18](#) would end tenure, and [Senate Bill 16](#) would make it [illegal for Suri to teach the ideas in his book.](#)

University deans already complain that the Legislature's anti-

intellectualism makes recruiting the world's top minds to Texas difficult. But ending tenure and fining professors for breaking with white supremacist orthodoxy will make it nearly impossible.

The best minds want to work at the best universities. The best companies want to recruit from the best universities. If the best professors take their research and go, corporations will follow them.

Culture wars may make good politics for the right, but they will also have consequences for the state's economy.

*Chris Tomlinson, named 2021 columnist of the year by the Texas Managing Editors, writes commentary about money, politics and life in Texas. Sign up for his "Tomlinson's Take" newsletter at [HoustonChronicle.com/TomlinsonNewsletter](https://HoustonChronicle.com/TomlinsonNewsletter) or [Expressnews.com/TomlinsonNewsletter](https://Expressnews.com/TomlinsonNewsletter).*

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Written By  
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Reach Chris on

Chris Tomlinson has written commentary about money, politics and life in Texas for Hearst Newspapers since 2014. In 2021, the Texas Association of Managing Editors awarded him columnist of the year, and the Headliners Foundation named him Texas's Star Opinion Writer. He's authored two New York Times Bestsellers, "Forget the Alamo: The Rise and Fall of an American Myth" and "Tomlinson Hill: The Remarkable Story of Two Families Who Share the Tomlinson Name - One White, One Black." Before joining the Houston Chronicle, he spent 20 years with The Associated Press reporting on politics, economics, conflicts and natural disasters from more than 30 countries in Africa, the Middle East and Europe.

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