



# WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: June 10, 2021

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## **Assembly GOP Doubles Down On Racism, Retaliates Against Member of Color’s Efforts to Address Systemic Racism**

*Democratic state representatives lift the curtain on racist retaliation in the legislature*

MADISON - Earlier this year, Republican leaders in the Wisconsin State Assembly refused to schedule a vote on [Assembly Joint Resolution \(AJR\) 10](#), the [Wisconsin Legislative Black Caucus](#)’ joint resolution recognizing February 2021 as Black History Month. Now, in response to being criticized for this refusal and called out on the problematic reasoning behind it, Assembly GOP leadership is doubling down on their manipulation, toxicity and racism.

Over the past several weeks, several Democratic state representatives have followed a long-standing practice of contacting the Assembly Majority Leader to request the scheduling of resolutions they have authored that they wish to bring to the floor for a vote. The resolutions have ranged in topic from recognizing LGBTQ Pride Month ([AJR 45](#)) to recognizing Wisconsin Motherhood Month ([AJR 51](#)) to recognizing Gun Violence Survivor Day ([AJR 55](#)).

In a bizarre and unusual twist, the response from Representative Steineke’s office to multiple representatives has been an email stating,

*“Acknowledging receipt of your scheduling request.*

*Please see the attached and consult with your leadership team with any questions you might have.”*

In every case, the attachment has been a copy of the [May 11, 2021 statement](#) by Rep. Francesca Hong (D-Madison) on the passage of [AJR 48](#) recognizing Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA) Heritage Month. In her statement, Rep. Hong expressed appreciation for the passage of the APIDA Heritage Month resolution and also referenced Assembly Republicans’ refusal to schedule the Black History Month resolution for a vote.

In short, while co-chairing a task force whose stated goal is to reduce racial disparities on a bipartisan basis, Rep. Steineke has been coordinating the efforts of Republican leadership behind the scenes to silence and retaliate against members that speak out against racism.

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Assistant Democratic Leader Dianne Hesselbein (D-Middleton) commented, **“Part of our job as legislators is to encourage the healthy exchange of ideas without airing personal grievances against individual members. Representative Steineke claimed he was being called racist and has now threatened to stop scheduling Democratic resolutions out of spite. We are here to support members that are willing to share their lived experiences and lift up the voices of others, not silence them.”**

Added Democratic Caucus Chair Mark Spreitzer (D-Beloit), **“These emails underscore the fact that Assembly Republicans have no qualms about shutting down uncomfortable conversations and see no problem with trying to scapegoat a member of color. It is outrageous, but not surprising, that Assembly Republicans doubled down on racism by following it up with homophobia and transphobia when they refused to schedule the LGBTQ Pride resolution. But they are mistaken if they think these actions do anything except emphasize the insidiousness of racism in Wisconsin and strengthen Assembly Democrats’ resolve to tackle it head on.”**

Said Rep. Francesca Hong (D-Madison), **“The work of tackling systemic racism is one of the most important issues facing Wisconsin. That work includes identifying and confronting oppression where it exists, including within the Legislature itself. As state leaders, we cannot refuse to talk about this issue because it feels uncomfortable. Silencing this conversation disregards the lived experiences of Wisconsinites in every community.”**

Rep. Kalan Haywood (D-Milwaukee) stated, **“As leaders and as legislators, we must be able and willing to listen to other people’s experiences and to have an open exchange of ideas and viewpoints. Any action, whether intention or unintentional, that results in any member being silenced, especially where it involves dialogue relating to equality or systematic racism, is hugely problematic, both for the Assembly and for the people of our great state.”**

Rep. Marisabel Cabrera (D-Milwaukee), who requested the scheduling of [AJR 45](#), added, **“This response from Republican leadership aims to pit legislators against one another, which is sadly emblematic of their attempts to pit Wisconsinites against one another. The Assembly as an institution cannot properly function under these oppressive and anti-democratic tactics. In effect, Republican leadership has rejected American democratic principles and representative government by attempting to suppress the voices of the members of the minority party and the people they represent.”**

Rep. Robyn Vining (D-Wauwatosa), who requested the scheduling of [AJR 51](#), stated, **“For Republican leadership to reject a resolution that honors the hard work of mothers across Wisconsin, highlights the racial disparities in maternal health care, and commits to a healthier path forward for all Wisconsin mothers, is extremely disappointing. But to do that in order to retaliate against legislators identifying racism is particularly reprehensible.”**

Democratic Leader Gordon Hintz (D-Oshkosh) concluded, **“Assembly Democrats will continue to advocate for the people of Wisconsin, who have made clear that systemic racism in our state must be addressed. Assembly Republicans must stop their manipulative actions and consider how they can encourage rather than stifle discussions in the Assembly on this topic in Wisconsin.”**

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