

NEWS RELEASE

March 2, 2021

Contact:

Candi Churchill, UFF executive director, candi.churchill@floridaea.org

Floridians need help and genuine leadership, not a culture war

United Faculty of Florida (UFF) members throughout the state are deeply concerned about the remarks made by Gov. Ron DeSantis during his appearance Monday with state House Speaker Chris Sprowls to “highlight proposed legislation to combat foreign influence” — with special emphasis on investigations at colleges and universities. We believe in the rights and liberties of all professors, visiting scholars, graduate assistants (GAs) and students in our higher education institutions.

At present, Floridians have urgent and immediate needs. We need help and genuine leadership. Instead, our governor uses his bully pulpit to engage in paranoid, xenophobic rhetoric. This behavior comes in a time in which all Americans are suffering from the direct and indirect effects of racism, hatred and violence in our country.

Below are reactions from UFF leaders across the state:

“United Faculty of Florida supports due process for all and the American ideal of innocence until proven guilty. We caution the governor not to condemn blameless academics or Floridians of Chinese (or Cuban, North Korean, Iranian, Russian, or Venezuelan) descent based on their identities, rather than evidence. We are also concerned that a ban on language and cultural exchanges may exacerbate cultural biases and the fear of the foreign which already exists.”

— **Karen Morian, UFF president, karen.morian@floridaea.org**

“We are in the midst of the worst health and economic crisis of our lifetime. I hear from students every day who are plagued with crushing debt, unaffordable housing and inaccessible health care. Faculty and university workers are desperate to get vaccinated to protect their loved ones and their own lives, yet our governor is busy fanning the flames of xenophobia. There are federal laws and processes in place to deal with espionage, corruption and conflicts of interest. The people’s representatives of Florida should get to work on the real needs of Floridians.”

— **Candi Churchill, UFF executive director, candi.churchill@floridaea.org**

“I invite Gov. DeSantis to come to the University of Florida (UF) to talk in person with UF’s Chinese and Chinese American faculty members in order to undo the damage he did (Monday) by engaging in racial scapegoating during his news conference. Gov. DeSantis’ remarks are especially disturbing given the long history of anti-Chinese racism in the United States.

**The Higher Education Affiliate of Florida Education Association, National Education Association,
American Federation of Teachers, and AFL-CIO**

When Gov. DeSantis engages in real conversations with Chinese faculty at UF, and when he learns about the amazing research that our colleagues are doing in tandem with academics in China, UFF-UF hopes that he will share this message of collaboration and educational excellence with the world as work we should all embrace.

Florida's colleges and universities work with students and communities across the globe. Attacking the citizenry in one nation detracts from our goal to be world leaders in innovation, research and learning generally."

— **Paul Ortiz, UFF-UF, president, president@uff-uf.org**

"Gov. DeSantis made inflammatory, xenophobic comments that fueled the anti-Asian rhetoric we have seen emerge during the midst of the worst global health crisis in a century. He painted a broad brush to try to capitalize on this rhetoric and infringe upon academic freedom. He villainized vital members of our institutions of higher learning, who are critical to the education of the next generation of future leaders, and produce groundbreaking research to improve the lives of all across industry and sector. He did so with no basis or correlation for the claims he made. We all must be the change we seek and stand up to racism and hate-fueled vitriol when we see it, and let Gov. DeSantis know that these deeply held bigotries have no place in the state of Florida, and our institutions of higher education will not stand by and allow this language and behavior to be institutionalized. To report hate crimes against Asian American Pacific Islander community members, use this reporting link from The Asian Pacific Policy Planning Council: <https://stopaapihate.org/>."

— **Adela Ghadimi, UFF vice president of the Bargaining Council for Graduate Assistants, adelaghadimi@gmail.com**

"This 'action' is just the latest show of bigotry and racism we would expect from DeSantis, and it intentionally hurts our Chinese GAs and faculty. These colleagues are invaluable for making research, science, and education move forward at UF; without their hard work and insight we would be stagnant as an institution. Rather than attacking them because of where they come from, we should be focusing on how to ensure they feel safe in their labs and classrooms as we traverse this ongoing pandemic."

— **Meridith Miska, co-president, UFF-UF-GAU, organizing@ufgau.org**

"I am concerned that the remarks from our governor and speaker of the House today signal a potential return to a John's Committee Era or a form of McCarthyism from the 1950s-1960s. We cannot allow the misdeeds of a few to be used as fuel for a misguided and irresponsible nativist backlash that hurts us all."

— **Robert Cassanello, president, UFF-UCF, robert.cassanello@gmail.com**

"Intellectual property theft by university researchers on behalf Chinese industry and government is a real problem. But it's a problem born of the corporatization of higher education in the US and the greed of university administrators, not of the vast majority of hardworking Chinese graduate workers, faculty, and students.

Instead of fanning the flames of anti-Chinese racism, Governor DeSantis could have used this moment as an opportunity to refocus Floridian's attention on how our institutes of higher education have abandoned their duty to educate Florida's future leaders and produce cutting-edge research that benefits all people, here and abroad, rather than attempt to score political points by further marginalizing a group who have borne the weight of some of the most virulent xenophobia in the history of our country, and who are presently suffering from even greater levels of xenophobia due to the reckless comments by the former president and current governor implying they are responsible for the current health crisis."

— **Bobby Mermer, co-president, UFF-UF-GAU, organizing@ufgau.org**