

NEWS RELEASE

Thursday, June 22nd, 2023

Contact:

Andrew Gothard, UFF President, andrew.gothard@floridaea.org

UFF Believes in Freedom, Accountability, and Collaboration —Unlike Gov. DeSantis

It is a fundamental truth that politicians do not belong in higher education classrooms. Elected officials don't have the right to tell adults what they can and cannot learn at Florida's colleges and universities. This undue political influence is exactly what accreditation principles protect against, and the fact that Gov. DeSantis seeks to dismantle those protections says all Floridians and Americans need to know about his character, his principles, and the façade of freedom that he peddles at each stop on the campaign trail.

Gov. DeSantis's lawsuit against the Biden administration and national accrediting bodies is a clear sign that, once again, all Floridians should believe this man when he tells us who he is. In attacking the accreditation process, Gov. DeSantis wants to dismantle all protections that ensure freedom of speech and expression in Florida's higher education system. In this act, he shows his true colors—that dissent, disagreement, and differing views are not allowed in the Sunshine State.

Gov. DeSantis is wrong when he says that accrediting bodies are unaccountable. Each accretor is composed of the institutions under its authority, and accreditation standards are created collaboratively between participating institutions. He is wrong when he says that removing these restrictions will be good for Florida's higher education system. Not one student, faculty member, administrator, or higher education community member is asking to remove these systems of accountability that are designed to produce the highest quality programs. And he is wrong when he says that accreditors are too involved in Florida's business. The involvement Gov. DeSantis disapproves of has been to warn about shoehorning an unqualified political appointee into the presidency of FSU, to investigate efforts to censor speech of faculty in a voting rights case against the state, and to ensure that Florida's students get an excellent education where they are free to learn, speak, and associate as they see fit.

Believe people when they tell you who they are. This lawsuit is a flashing neon sign from Gov. DeSantis that displays the same message for all who are willing to look—"Florida is where freedom goes to die."

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