



TO: Students, Faculty and Staff
FROM: Chuck Staben, President
DATE: April 8, 2019
SUBJECT: Free Speech and Our University of Idaho Values

Some members of our campus community have objected to a recognized student group's invitation of a speaker to the Moscow campus today and the nature of that event. I appreciate hearing that concern, and I understand it. The talk is being given by a non-University of Idaho-affiliated person named C.R. Wiley and is titled "Toxic Matriarchy."

One of the values described in our Strategic Plan is respect. "The University of Idaho is an extensive and diverse community of people from varied backgrounds and beliefs. We welcome the viewpoints and contributions of everyone in our community. We believe that an institution is only as strong as its ability to include diverse perspectives that critically contribute to the University of Idaho's mission." Paradoxically, that belief in welcome and inclusion is tested by our willingness to hear out viewpoints with which we may disagree. The American Civil Liberties Union states, "How much we value the right of free speech is put to its severest test when the speaker is someone we disagree with most."

The university is not a sponsor of the event. This event is organized by a recognized student group, and the university, a public institution, made a venue available. We would do the same for any student group, and I hope it is understood that in such cases, any views and opinions are the views of the speaker and are not necessarily the views of U of I. The university cannot withdraw resources - a venue - commonly made available just because a speaker is controversial.

The university reserves the right to act appropriately - and will do so - when it appears an event or speech endangers others. The high threshold for that action includes "fighting words" scenarios or physical disruption and endangerment, but that seems unlikely to apply here. I understand that this talk's subject matter may be upsetting to some. A commitment to equity and diversity runs very deep at this institution, and is central to our work and our identity. I am confident this event, and others that challenge us in the future, will help us affirm who we are and what we value.