NWSA Condemns the Racially Insensitive Remarks of Chancellor Thomas L. Keon

As we move toward the end of the year and into the holiday season, the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) feels compelled to speak out against the racially insensitive remarks made by Purdue Northwest Chancellor Thomas L. Keon during the commencement exercises on December 10, 2022. Although Chancellor Keon has apologized by noting that "we are all human" and that he made a mistake, his comments fail to address the deeply racist nature of what he said and how comfortable he felt saying it. Given that the university failed to hold its Chancellor publicly accountable (even after a video of his comments went viral across the internet) only adds to the concern that this is indicative of a widespread problem of institutionalized racism against Asian international students and Asian American students.

Even more disturbing is that Chancellor Keon noted in his apology that he would head up an "interdisciplinary team" to address issues important to the university's Asian American and Pacific Islander community and meet with the Student Government Association. It is alarming and unsettling that the university's Board of Trustees and administrative leadership staff feel comfortable with having the person who made the racist comments lead a committee to review their actions. We feel strongly that this decision would only further traumatize students and faculty from the Asian and Asian American communities.

We call on the Purdue University System Board of Trustees to step up and take a stand against this type of behavior from any members of their faculty and staff, especially those who hold leadership positions and therefore represent and speak for the university.

Sincerely,
Karsonya Wise Whitehead, President
Ariella Rotramel, Vice President
Karma Chavez, Treasurer
Heidi R. Lewis, Secretary
NWSA Executive Committee

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