

## Generational Gaslighting

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***Sen. Smith writes about how Legislative Republicans chose to cut the UW System's budget by \$32 million, leaving universities almost half a billion dollars short.***

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MADISON - Ever hear the term gaslighting? It's an odd term, but the practice has become too common in politics these days. It comes from a play written by Patrick Hamilton called "Gaslight." In the play, a husband manipulates his wife into thinking she is having a mental breakdown by gradually changing the intensity of the gaslamps in their home.

A contemporary example is the rhetoric surrounding our college campuses. Republicans claim college students are being indoctrinated by liberal educators and institutions. It's the latest futile effort to make our younger generations second-guess their educational experience.

This has been a coordinated effort by the Republican Party in every state across the nation. Republicans have come to realize they have nothing left to offer young voters. Republicans haven't quite given up yet, but their last chance is to gaslight our next generation, or at the very least discredit their thoughts and opinions. Their hardline opposition to abortion and innate desire to cut government into nothing is too entrenched within their ranks. The philosophical

divide between outdated conservative principles doesn't jive with new and progressive desire for change favored by most in our next generation.



College students have turned out in droves in recent elections, overcoming continual attempts by Republicans to suppress their vote over the past 13 years. Republicans shortened the early voting period, passed a voter ID law that doesn't allow certain college IDs and gerrymandered campuses to limit students' ability to elect candidates of their choice.

Republicans aren't shy about it either. At a recent Republican National Convention event, Cleta Mitchell from the Bradley Foundation said, "What is this young people effort that they do? They basically put the polling place next to the student dorm so they just have to roll out of bed, vote, and go back to bed."

The Republicans' next best strategy to prevent college students from voting is to gaslight them into thinking they are being brainwashed by our educators and universities. It's how they've justified their devastating cuts to the UW System and endless attempts to depress voter turnout in college communities.

As a father, I've learned to listen to our younger generation. Young people want to shape our society and make their own decisions. After all, they will be the ones who inherit the world we build today. Our job as the current leaders of our society is to give them every best chance to succeed by listening to them now.

Republicans can do better by listening and appealing to young voters. If we choose to listen, there's so much to learn about how a bright-eyed generation perceives the world our older

generations created. These fresh perspectives can help us understand that our society and institutions unfairly favor certain races over others, or that gender identity and sexual orientation are more complex than what many people thought. We will understand how hard it is for young people to flourish in our current economy.



Underlying all of these ailments to our society, we will understand that our cardinal sin has been ignoring problems until they become crises. It's not indoctrination that's driving the conversation in education. It's a different perspective and a new, clear view of our current problems. We should encourage young people choosing to address rather than ignore the problems in our society.

I didn't have the opportunity to go to college; I learned my trade as a window cleaner from my dad and developed it into a successful business. It's ironic that I'm now the only State Senator in Wisconsin to represent two four-year UW schools. Like so many in our state, I have great respect for the "Wisconsin Idea" that education should influence people's lives beyond the boundaries of the classroom. I learned by listening to everyone, separating the facts from the BS, making more than my fair share of mistakes and volunteering every bit of my free time to supporting our community's schools.

I call it like I see it. Right now, I see Republicans giving up on our next generation and telling young people that they can't think for themselves. It doesn't take a college education to see through this last-ditch effort to keep a generation down.

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*Senator Smith represents District 31 in the Wisconsin State Senate. The 31st Senate District includes all of Buffalo, Pepin and Trempealeau counties and portions of Pierce, Dunn, Eau*

*Claire, Jackson and St. Croix counties.*

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