

- CATHY WURZER:** Our top story-- University of Minnesota Regent Steve Sviggum continues to be under fire for comments he made recently about the makeup of the University of Minnesota-Morris student body. Speaking about declining enrollment at a committee discussion last week, Sviggum, who is a former Speaker of the Minnesota House, asked whether it's possible UM-Morris has become, quote, "too diverse."
- He added that he's received letters from friends whose children, in his words, didn't feel comfortable attending the university. In response, Morris Student Body President Dylan Young wrote a letter that ended by inviting Regent Sviggum to dinner on campus with him, and other student leaders, and members of marginalized groups. He joins me now for an update. Hey, Dylan, how are you?
- DYLAN YOUNG:** I'm doing pretty good. How are you doing?
- CATHY WURZER:** Good. I'm fine. Dylan, something not all listeners might know about the U of M-Morris campus, it's on the site of a former boarding school for Native children. It's also become one of the most diverse campuses in the state thanks, in no small part, to free tuition for Native American students as a result of that painful history. And I'm wondering, what were your first thoughts when you heard about Regent Sviggum's comments?
- DYLAN YOUNG:** My first thought when I heard regents Williams comment was simply to question, what is he talking about? I don't understand what too diverse means. I don't understand why the question is being asked. What percentage of the student body do we reach for us to decide, this is the number. This is what too diverse is. This is when we went too far. What are you talking about, Regent Sviggum?
- CATHY WURZER:** What do you think he was trying to get at by wondering if there's too much diversity on campus?
- DYLAN YOUNG:** He was saying that because we have such a high enrollment of BIPOC students, white students are not going to feel as comfortable as they usually would coming to Morris.
- CATHY WURZER:** I know Morris is on a break right now. Have you had a chance to talk with the student leaders about this?
- DYLAN YOUNG:** Yeah. The evening that Regent Sviggum talked about it, I was able to reach out to our Black Student Union, Circle of Nations Indigenous Association, our Union Latinx, and Asian Association, the diversity organizations on campus. They actually cosigned the letter that we sent to Regent Sviggum Monday morning.
- CATHY WURZER:** MPR News talked with Regent Sviggum yesterday, and he was asked whether he regretted asking the question. And now here's how he responded.
- STEVE SVIGGUM:** I don't regret asking questions at all, Tom. I think we need to ask questions in public policy to make sure that the policy is addressing our concerns, our goals. Besides just a question of diversity, I asked questions about the competition amongst higher education institutions, certainly the number of market forces that are out there, how many graduating seniors do we have.
- CATHY WURZER:** So you wrote him a letter, as you say, that ended with an invitation to dinner. What are you hoping to hear from him when you meet?

**DYLAN YOUNG:** Well, I'm hoping that he could come to our campus and actually learn about what the diversity looks like here on the ground, rather than hearing it from a letter, because that's a whole different experience. And I'm hoping that by the end of our time together, he backs down from what he said, that he apologizes, and realizes even if you have the right to ask that question, it's a stupid question, right? If you go to the University of Minnesota-Morris campus, you will learn that diversity is not even in the list of the top-100 problems at the University of Minnesota-Morris for students.

**CATHY** In that diversity is a strength.

**WURZER:**

**DYLAN YOUNG:** Yes. Exactly. In the letter, I say that. Diversity is not part of the problem. I think it's going to be part of the solution, right? We have such a growing BIPOC population around the nation, but especially in Minnesota. Why shouldn't Morris tap into that, right?

**CATHY** By the way, what was the region's response to your letter? Have you heard from him?

**WURZER:**

**DYLAN YOUNG:** Yeah, I heard from him shortly after sending it. He thanked me for the letter and then said that he will begin planning his trip to Morris.

**CATHY** OK. Getting back to what he said, his friends said that the white kids didn't feel comfortable attending Morris  
**WURZER:** because of how diverse it is. Now, in contrast, you described the discomfort you have felt as a Native student on campus. What has led you to feel uncomfortable at times at Morris?

**DYLAN YOUNG:** I think it's very simple. And I think it's very universal to every BIPOC student, not just at Morris, but every higher education institution in the United States-- I face many financial barriers to continuing my education. I face mental health struggles. I face discrimination within the classroom and on-campus.

And you look at what's causing these problems, all of them lead to one simple fact, and that's the fact that BIPOC students, queer students, students from low income backgrounds, first generation students-- higher education was not made for us to succeed, much less feel included. So you get into these structural barriers that are keeping us from graduating, and that's sort of been part of my discomfort at the university.

One of the bright parts of that experience has been being a part of the Native American community on-campus. Being able to be a part of a community of people who come from a similar background as me, are going through the same educational journey has been incredibly healing and powerful to be a part of. And it's one of the reasons why I chose Morris. And I think that's what you're going to find among a lot of our BIPOC community.

We chose Morris because of this. Like I said, it's not a subtraction to Morris. It's an addition, right? It's a plus.

**CATHY** Can I ask what are campus administrators-- have about a minute left in our conversation-- what are campus  
**WURZER:** administrators doing to make BIPOC students feel more comfortable on campus?

**DYLAN YOUNG:** I think Acting Chancellor Janet Schrunk Ericksen has done a lot of work in the past year to interact with our BIPOC students and make them feel welcome here at Morris. Like she had said during that moment Regent Sviggum made this comments, she had just met with the Black student union that week. And I think that's fantastic.

**CATHY** Say, before you go, I have to ask you this-- do you think Regent Sviggum should step down from the board of  
**WURZER:** regents or be removed?

**DYLAN YOUNG:** Here's what I think-- I think that anyone who oversees a college who believes diversity is what's causing these ailments, these enrollment struggles should not be in the position that they are. By inviting Steve Sviggum on the campus, we're giving him a chance to learn, a chance to develop, and a chance to apologize, and rescind his comments. By the end of the night if he doesn't do that, then the boot fits.

**CATHY** All right. Dylan Young, I'm going to leave it right there. Thank you for your time this morning.  
**WURZER:**

**DYLAN YOUNG:** Yeah, of course. Thank you.

**CATHY** We've been talking to Dylan Young. Dylan is the student body president at the University of Minnesota-Morris.  
**WURZER:**