

When the FAA and DEI Don't Mix

By Victor Davis Hanson

I'd like to talk about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

[President] Donald Trump caused a firestorm in the aftermath of this horrific and tragic crash at [Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport]. He mentioned that he was going to examine the role of diversity, equity, [and] inclusion.

What he meant was criteria other than merit that go into hiring these critical positions in the air traffic controller tower, but also as pilots and general in the military.

And people got very angry, and they said this was inappropriate. But like all things Donald Trump does, he tries to open a very sensitive issue in a very loud fashion, and that brings attention to it, and then, people do some investigation.

Greenland is a good example. "How dare he say he wants to buy Greenland?" Then we discover that Denmark is investing almost no money in Greenland. We discovered that Greenland is in North America. Did you know that? It's closer to New York than it is in Copenhagen.

That this left-wing Danish government is way behind on its NATO contributions. And it's an imperialist power with a colony that it doesn't really help too much. So, there's always more to it, and there is with diversity [and] inclusion.

So, now we are learning that there were mandates about a person's race and mandates about a person's sexual orientation.

When I say mandates, I mean that people who didn't fit those criteria were not encouraged to apply. [The Federal Aviation Administration] disbanded a lot of university programs that encourage people with military experience or encourage people that had courses in scientific disciplines or mathematics or aeronautics not to apply.

And the assistant director of the FAA and a former applicant nominee who was rejected, they were just explicit about that.

But here's the thing about DEI in general: It's a system that has many faces. In the old Soviet Union, it was not race or gender, it was ideology. And one of the reasons, among many, but I think the prime reason, that the Soviet Union imploded was they had an apparat, a group of incompetents that swore that they were more ideologically and Marxist-Leninist pure than anybody else.

And they were given the top billets in rocket science and military affairs. We saw that in World War II, with the Red Army almost collapsed in June of 1941. And within a year, all the commissars were out.

DEI is a commissar system. I once was in Libya and I asked this person—a high government official—I was interviewing, I said, "You have potholes everywhere, but you're the fifth-largest producer of oil in the world."

"Mr. Hanson, we hire our first cousin, first. We're a tribal society." He told me that.

The thing about DEI—what Trump brought up with the FAA—ask yourself something: If it's so good, why don't people just say that? Why don't they just say, we're willing to have collateral damage? We're going to bring in people that may not have traditional criteria or traditional resumes, but we're willing to take that risk with your life.

They never say that.

And remember one thing else, if you hire someone on the basis of their race, or their gender, or their sexual orientation, and they know it, then why would that be the end of it? That is the beginning.

If you show up late for work, if you don't do your job, if you're subject to an audit, then you think, I want the same exemptions that were accorded me when I was hired. I need them.

And of course, no one ever discusses that. So, what we're watching is, if it turns out to be true that the tower was understaffed, that one person was let go early, that the air traffic controller made a mistake, that the pilot was at the wrong [elevation], these were all mistakes.

It was a perfect storm, apparently, of blunders. And if those blunders are connected with people who felt they were not subject to meritocratic criteria, there's going to be a scandal.



The Department of Transportation's Federal Aviation Administration building in Washington on July 21, 2007. Saul Loeb/AFP via Getty images

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s, but Donald Trump is bringing attention to it. And by bringing attention, then, what do we do? We review the Biden-Obama FAA, and we discover—not us, we knew it a long time—but the general public, discovers that they have been systematically using race and gender and sexual orientation, not just to promote particular people, but to exclude people who have had perfect scores on tests, who come from the military, who have majors in the type of college disciplines that would be perfectly suitable for an FAA controller.

And if that's true, then we're in big trouble. I'll just finish with this observation: When affirmative action started, some 50 years ago, I was a graduate student, and one of the professors said, "You're not going to get a job." None of the three males in the graduate program in classics—when you get your Ph.D. or not—and I said to them, "That doesn't seem fair."

And he said, "We're guinea pigs, academia. Who cares about a

classics professor?" So, we will be, basically, diverse. But nobody's going to worry about that you use criteria because who cares about classics?

I thought that was a very cynical thing to say about an advocate. But then he said, "But of course, we would never do this with atomic reactors, nuclear reactors. We'd never do this with brain surgeons." And then he said this, "And we would never do this with FAA air traffic control." And that's exactly what we may have been doing.

[It] doesn't mean that was culpable in this particular instance. It means that this particular instance has got us worried about the system, in general, and we want to improve it.

And one of the things we can do is take a hard look at the FAA.

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