

June 16, 2020

Toni Van Pelt
NOW President
1100 H Street
Suite 300
Washington, DC, 2005
pres@now.org

CC:

Christian Nunes, National NOW Vice President
Gina Austin Fresh, NOW Heartland Board Representative
Barbara Miller, NOW Heartland Board Representative
Jocelyn Morris, NOW Heartland Board Representative

Subject: Resignation from Office

Dear Ms. Van Pelt:

The Minneapolis/St Paul chapter of the National Organization for Women endorses MN NOW's call for your immediate resignation as President of NOW, and we join our voice to theirs. Your leadership consistently engenders a "white women first" culture, which our members experienced firsthand on several occasions, and your behavior towards Black, Indigenous, POC, and transgender members flies in the face of basic tenets of our organization. NOW's relevance, credibility, and future depend on your immediate resignation.

Following the murder of George Floyd, you sent an email with the heading "*I can't breathe*" - *We all can't breathe.*" You went on to say "*We are all choking on injustice and oppression.*" MSP NOW is horrified and embarrassed to be part of an organization led by a white woman who, in this terrible moment in our nation's on-going history of lynching black men and women, tried to lay claim to their suffering. In this moment, anti-racist activists with white privilege need to reflect, acknowledge our complacency and complicity, and commit to decisive action to make real change. Your response was both unconscionable and revealing.

BIPOC women have been long underrepresented in leadership and membership at NOW, which your actions as President perpetuate and promote. Kim Sontag's Facebook post was egregiously racist, and her employment should have been terminated immediately. Instead, NOW continues to employ her months later. This sends a clear message to BIPOC members and partners that racial justice is a priority for NOW in name only. Racial sensitivity training is a grossly inadequate response to this post and demonstrates your lack of commitment to anti-racist work. We believe Gilda Yazzie's terrible account of working for you as an Indigenous woman, and we are enraged that you did not allow Yazzie to lead our organization into a more intersectional and representative era. We are devastated by the mistreatment she received in her time as Vice President, as well

as Monica Weeks' experience, whose account of the 2017 election is deeply troubling. Your tokenism and sidelining of current Vice President Christian Nunes is further proof of this pattern of racism, and we deem you unfit to lead our organization.

Our historic organization has made missteps in the journey towards intersectional feminism, and we can only move forward with leadership that lives our values. There is no place for racism, transphobia, or abuses of power in NOW. Your behavior is unacceptable, antithetical to the NOW core values, and we call for your immediate resignation.

Signed,

The Executive Board of MSP NOW

Bri Sharkey-Smith, Marquita Oleson, Grace Anderson, Sarah Mitchell Smith, Sarah Holland, Mara Brust, Emma Willard