

TESTIMONY OF RICHARD VEDDER  
COMMITTEE ON WORKFORCE AND HIGHER EDUCATION  
OHIO SENATE,  
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**Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram and Other Members of the Committee. My name is Richard Vedder and I am Distinguished Professor of Economics Emeritus at Ohio University. I served on the Spellings Commission on the Future of Higher Education and am on the Board of the National Association of Scholars.**

**As King Henry the Eighth told his fifth wife, “I’ll be brief.” Senate Bill 83 is complex and incorporates many provisions, some of which I may not fully agree with, but in general I am highly supportive of this legislation and wish to offer personal experiences relating to three provisions, relating to diversity, equity and inclusion, which I will hereafter call DEI, to the teaching of history, and to limiting faculty strikes that impede instruction.**

**First, regarding DEI. I think the existence of an aggressive DEI bureaucracy has jeopardized a wonderful program promoting excellence in academic research at Ohio University. For six decades, each year that University designates one individual as a “Distinguished Professor” based on his or her research accomplishments. By promoting research, including providing recognition and support to Distinguished Professors, OU recently attained coveted R1 status, accorded to only 146 American universities including four in Ohio universities for “very high research activity.”**

**Ohio university annually awards a Distinguished Professor based on research accomplishments. Historically, existing Distinguished Professors chose new members, and most do not pay attention to the race, gender, national origin or other biological or**

**non-academic attributes of the faculty. Of the seven awardees since 2015, four were women, and two of the males are immigrants to the U.S. Over time, OU has selected a number of persons of color as well.**

**Despite this, one of our group, who I understood favored a female nominee, was furious when a male was selected recently. She filed a complaint with our DEI bureaucracy, which then interviewed most of the distinguished professors, and then recommended radical new selection procedures which allow the president to designate a majority of the committee, including individuals of little or no research distinction. The committee under proposed procedures must have a “diversity advocate,” and all selection committee members must undergo diversity training “to learn the ...actions/strategies necessary to creative an inclusive, accessible, consistent, and compliant candidate evaluation and selection process.” Many of the Distinguished Professors are offended and even furious of the implication that they need to be trained by non-academics in being racially and gender conscious, particularly given our past actions. Research is being downplayed, DEI bureaucracies are inserting themselves inappropriately and unnecessarily in a research matter. By the way, Monday’s *Inside Higher Education* reported the University of Missouri is abandoning a requirement that job applicants submit a diversity statement, as that state’s legislature considers a bill containing provisions similar to S.B. 83. I hope you support the research reputation of my university by removing the nightmare of DEI led efforts to dilute academic excellence.**

**Moving on to history. I am an economic historian and have long lamented how students today are ignorant of how our nation’s extraordinary economic success happened. I wanted to create a**

**chair to support the teaching of American economic history as I fully retired. As an aside, my department chair said I could no longer teach the course, for no salary, because it was too popular and I took students away from other professors, increasing their vulnerability of being fired. I was too good and too popular, always having very high student evaluations. By the way, yesterday, I testified on the state budget in the Ohio House accompanied by a bright OU student whose research was critical to my testimony – even though the university rejects my involvement in formal instruction.**

**Working with a colleague, I got a large grant from a private foundation to fund teaching economic history after my retirement. OU signed the grant agreement after much haggling, only to later renege on its commitment, with the current president saying we don't need another history person, but should be funding positions in finance. I know of a donor who would make a multi-million-dollar commitment to funding the economic history position, but the university won't budge ---no to history, yes to finance. If Senate Bill 83 were law, the chances of that happening likely would have been significantly reduced.**

**Third, let me tell you a story that supports the need to protect students stranded by professors going on strike. One of my former students is a very good history professor at Wright State. Four years ago, faculty there went on strike for several weeks, severely disrupting the education of tuition-paying students. My former student, however, kept meeting his students during the strike since he had a contract and felt correctly that was his obligation.**

**Yet my student's colleagues were furious, ostracizing him, forcing him out of an administrative role, and leading him to wonder whether he should be pursuing a career outside of**

**academia, which would be a tragedy since he is a superb scholar with a Ph.D. from a prestigious Ivy League university.**

**Is S.B. 83 perfect? Probably not. Is there a danger in over-legislating, imposing requirements not entirely appropriate to a university's situation? Absolutely. But universities have gone amuck. They are too expensive, teach too little useful knowledge, and, worst of all, are becoming contemptuous of free expression of ideas –the heart of what is necessary both to creating knowledge and aiding in its dissemination. Therefore, maybe with some fine tuning, S.B. 83 should become law in the Buckeye State.**

**Clergy, politicians and professors tend to talk too much, and ignore the law of diminishing returns. With that in mind, I will stop now but am willing to respond to Committee questions. Thank you.**