

TESTIMONY OF RICHARD VEDDER
SENATE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE
OHIO SENATE, STATEHOUSE COLUMBUS, OH
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Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Higher Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on Senate Bill 1.

Senate Bill 1 does at least 10 very useful things.

- 1. It commits state universities to promoting intellectual diversity –a multiplicity of ideas;**
- 2. It says universities as institutions will stay out of politics even though individual students and faculty can peacefully express themselves as they wish;**
- 3. Most importantly, S.B. 1 eliminates pernicious discriminatory, costly, and anti-meritorious DEI programs;**
- 4. It provides for needed training in American civic institutions and history for all undergraduates;**
- 5. It bans faculty strikes, ending disruptions in education to tuition paying students;**
- 6. It provides mandatory training for university governing boards, who have too often been ineffective in dealing with campus inefficiencies and abuses;**
- 7. It provides for public disclosure of five-year university financial plans;**
- 8. It initiates the study of the possibility of offering three-year bachelor degrees, already offered in most other nations;**
- 9. It mandates the computer accessibility to the syllabuses of all courses taught;**
- 10. It provides for more systematic evaluation of faculty performance, including post-tenure review that could in a few extreme cases lead to tenure revocation.**

I was teaching a college class the day John F. Kennedy was assassinated 61 years ago and ever since. Over my academic lifetime, costs have soared, student learning has declined, and universities have increasingly abandoned their role of serving as vibrant marketplaces of ideas, instead developing discriminatory and anti-meritorious positions more reminiscent of schools in totalitarian dictatorships. S.B. 1 is a much-needed start in providing some adult supervision to our colleges and universities without interfering with their ability to advance the creation and dissemination of knowledge and

artistic expression, nor their responsibility of helping turn relatively immature adolescents into responsible knowledgeable adults.

Thank you, and enclosed is additional testimony.

ADDITIONAL TESTIMONY

Perhaps I should first discuss my qualifications to testify. I am a Distinguished Professor of Economics at Ohio University and a Senior Fellow at the Independent Institute. I am an economic historian who has published many books, and written hundreds of papers. I serve on Governor DeWine's Economic Roundtable. Most relevant here, I served on the federal Spellings Commission on the Future of Higher Education. I have written extensively on higher education. My latest book, *Let Colleges Fail: The Power of Creative Destruction in Higher Education*, is out in April and can be purchased now from Amazon. Earlier I wrote *Going Broke By Degree: Why Colleges Cost Too Much* and *Restoring the Promise: Higher Education in America*. I have worked both as a staff member and consultant with the Joint Economic Committee of Congress and testified frequently before Congress and such diverse other bodies as the European Parliament and states legislatures literally from Alaska to Florida. I tell folks that I have drunk vodka with Putin in the Kremlin, whiskey with Netanyahu in Vienna, coffee with Margaret Thatcher in London, and wine with George W. Bush at his house in Texas.

The most important single part of Senate Bill 1 is the prohibition of DEI bureaucracies on public university campuses in Ohio. While the costs of these programs have reached into the millions at Ohio State and no doubt consequential amounts elsewhere, the crowding out of legitimate academic activities by DEI spending is not my major objection. DEI has denigrated the assessment of academic contributions strictly on the basis of factual evidence and novel useful ways of discovering new truths, and instead uses non-merit-based methods of assessing performance. Emphasis is put especially on race, and secondarily on the gender or sexual orientation of members of the university community. More bluntly, DEI is racist, discriminatory, and anti-merit.

Let me relate a little my own harrowing DEI experiences. At Ohio University, for over 60 years we have given a Distinguished Professor award to the very best, most widely acclaimed members of our faculty based on their research achievements. Selection of new Distinguished Professors, typically one per year, was made by existing highly regarded scholars making up that group. Women and nonwhites have been well represented in the group. A few years ago, two of the Distinguished Professors, both women who are now both retired and do not even live in Ohio, were unhappy with the selection of a new Distinguished Professor, a male, and filed a complaint with the DEI bureaucracy. They questioned all the Distinguished Professors, including me who has not received a paycheck from OU for over a decade. I felt I was treated rather rudely, almost as if I were a defendant in a criminal proceeding. The DEI folks cajoled the administration to changing the rules on selecting Distinguished Professors, diluting their power and ensuring that selection is not done predominantly by the wrong people obsessed with academic achievement, namely the university's top scholars.

Recent stories on DEI abuses abound, such as that at the University of Colorado cited in Monday's *Wall Street Journal*. Ohio State's splurge a few years ago in hiring DEI people to match the DEI jihad occurring at the University of Michigan received much attention. The retreat from merit and the overt racist nature of much DEI activity is threatening our nation's leadership in higher education, and the recent moves by the U.S. president and the governors of two of our

adjoining states, Indiana and West Virginia, are much to be applauded. And I look forward to Governor DeWine signing this landmark legislation.

The ignorance of the origins of American exceptionalism among young Americans is dangerous for national unity. It is our knowledge and appreciation of the roots of our extraordinary success as a nation, and an appreciation of our constitutional framework, that is the glue that ties us together as Americans. Requiring additional study in our civic and historical heritage is much needed.

Some public safety workers such as police and fire personnel perform such vital work that we outlaw their going on strike. A good case can be made for extending that to individuals vital to training our next generation of leaders. When faculty at Wright State University several years ago went on strike, students who had paid tuition fees were left stranded academically, imposing significant financial and educational hardships. The school quite appropriately suffered huge long lasting enrollment losses. Prohibiting strikes during academic terms is needed.

State universities are financed partly by public funds to serve the broader community, people of widely different political, religious, economic, racial and other demographic characteristics. That is as it should be. Universities provide a vibrant but civil forum for the vigorous examination and debates of the issues of the day. Universities are like cities – communities of disparate individuals. Those individuals can and even should express their opinion on the issues of the day. But the university itself, as represented by its leaders, should stay out of politics, except when directly and materially impacted by public policy actions.

When universities award tenure, they are making an implicit financial commitment that reaches into seven figures. Tenure serves a useful function, and personally it shielded me from the ire of at least one governor and several other powerful political figures. But it can and occasionally is abused, with senior professors slacking off in their later years, doing little research or high-quality teaching. Post tenure review is thus not only appropriate, but needed, and S.B. 1 establishes a responsible approach to minimizing tenure related issues.

I find particularly interesting the legislation's proposal to study the feasibility of three-year bachelor degrees, the norm at such fine schools as the University of Oxford or Cambridge University. I think there are ways we can offer a shorter path to degrees without diluting quality, saving students a lot of money and better utilizing our facilities.

There is a tendency among academics to ignore the law of diminishing returns --the longer they go on, the less effective every word becomes. With that in mind, I will stop.

Thank you.