

Opponent Testimony Regarding S.B. 1
Submitted by John Avouris, February 10, 2025

Greetings members of the Ohio Senate Higher Education Committee. Thank you for receiving my written testimony today in opposition to Senate Bill 1. I have already written to my own Senator who chairs this committee briefly regarding my feelings on this bill, but I felt compelled to share my opposition with the entirety of the committee.

This bill is a [bad] solution in search of a problem in so much of what it seeks to do. First, effectively removing retrenchment, discipline, and evaluation from the realm of collective bargaining for higher education faculty is wrong. People who have dedicated their lives to furthering our understanding of the world—whether through biology, history, art, aeronautics, or whatever the field may be—deserve to have a voice in their working conditions. Those conditions include how they are evaluated, how decisions regarding layoffs and cuts are made, and the process for disciplining a faculty member. For over forty years, faculty have had this right and it *has* worked. And, to the extent in individual cases it may not work as well as hoped, I would submit that the problem lies more with managers and supervisors who neglect their responsibilities. Taking away rights from faculty is certainly not the answer for that problem.

The same is true for the way this bill seeks to prohibit faculty from striking. This is such a rare occurrence in Ohio (or anywhere, for that matter) that it clearly seems more an ideological thing rather than, as the bill's original sponsor claims, seeking to "protect" college students from being used as "pawns." The right to strike balances the scales somewhat between deep-pocketed colleges and universities (relative to labor disputes) and faculty members when there are disagreements. But even then, that right is so rarely used. In 20 years of living in Ohio, I can only recall two such instances—hardly the kind of epidemic that must be contained in this fashion.

As for other elements of this ill-advised bill, I have read the reporting of the *Capital State Journal* regarding the sponsor's testimony around the so-called "controversial issues" components. As I wrote previously to Senator Roegner, if we are seeking to create an absolutely ignorant population that is the laughingstock of the developed world, this is the way to go. To say that a professor cannot tell a student who "doesn't believe in" gravity or that the earth is round that they are wrong (and show them why) is absurd and dangerous. Gravity, the shape of the planet, these things are simply facts. To allow students to simply say "I don't believe that," and the faculty member's response can only be, "Well, here is evidence that would seem to contradict your belief, but your belief is just as acceptable," is lunacy.

Is such a student going to be prepared to enter into any kind of scientific employment, either in the private or public sectors? How will such a student make productive and meaningful decisions about their role in the world as well as how we as a society should approach the solving of difficult problems or entrepreneurial challenges? What is to stop such a weak-minded student from simply saying, using the same logic, "I don't believe in that chemical formula" to their chemistry professor, and demanding that the test they just failed accordingly be changed to a passing grade? And before you say, "Well, this bill

wouldn't do that," please note the bill's sponsor said in sponsor testimony exactly that. If gravity is up for debate as a "controversial issue," then what facts are *not* up for debate as such?

And even more dangerously, from a societal and human perspective, the bill's sponsor applies this same "logic" to things such as the Holocaust. This goes beyond the lunacy I have described above and turns our college classrooms into facile places where dangerous ideas of anti-Semitism, racial superiority and inferiority and the like can breed unchecked by reality. As a society, both in our state here in Ohio as well as in our country, we cannot afford to dismiss these kinds of ideas. Throughout history, when such things have been ignored or allowed to fester, people's lives have been lost—both directly through the atrocities committed as well as indirectly through the usually bloody wars that follow.

I am the product of a public university education, as is my wife. The oldest four of our kids have all gone through public higher education or are currently in it. Have we encountered professors who have been ideological? Yes. Absolutely. Both in a so-called "liberal" direction *and* in conservative directions. But besides the fact that these situations have been the distinct minority of educational interactions, we all have found that such encounters encourage deeper thought, analysis of our own beliefs and convictions, and in stronger minds. In some cases, such analysis and consideration has led to a much deeper strength of thought and belief in what we held prior. In other cases, precisely as education *should* do, it has exposed weaknesses and resulted in changed minds and growth. Both of these are desirable outcomes and should be celebrated not legislated against.

For all the reasons above and for the good our state, its intellectual and economic future and well-being, I urge each of you to vote no on this extremely ill-advised piece of legislation.

Thank you.

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