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Senator Kristina D. Roegner
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Dear Senator Roegner:

I am submitting written testimony in opposition to SB1/HB6. While I work at The Ohio State University, I wish to make it clear that I am speaking as a citizen of the State of Ohio, and that any opinions expressed in this letter are entirely my own.

When I read through this bill I see a number of potential restrictions on free speech that are truly disturbing and unlikely to pass a court test. (Similar restrictions in Florida's Stop WOKE Act have been struck down.) They are also remarkably poorly defined. I'll discuss a number of those restrictions in this testimony.

Perhaps the most problematic free speech restriction is that on controversial policies, defined as, "any belief or policy that is the subject of political controversy, including issues such as climate policies, electoral politics, foreign policy, diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, immigration policy, marriage, or abortion." This is an absolutely stunning restriction on free speech for multiple reasons. It is unclear how universities will produce informed, mature citizens if controversial policies are not allowed inside the classroom. I would also wonder how we can teach citizenship without teaching about electoral politics. Citizenship is engagement in the political system of one's city, state and nation, it is not the passive acceptance of whatever bills are passed. Some of the areas mentioned as the subject of political controversy are inherently controversial. If the Department of Political Science cannot teach controversial foreign policy, it can't teach foreign policy at all. Every act of foreign policy is controversial. Other ideas mentioned, such as climate change, may be the subject of political controversy but it has not been the subject of scientific controversy for years. In the social sciences, President Trump has begun to impose tariffs on foreign goods. Does this mean that economists will not be allowed to teach the politically controversial idea that free trade makes societies wealthier? The benefits of free trade are not at all controversial among professional economists.

Any ongoing political controversy about climate change or free trade shows the single most serious flaw in the restriction of teaching controversial policies. A corporation can manufacture a controversy simply by hiring a PR flack. The restriction on teaching controversial policies is therefore simply an invitation to censor classroom debate and thereby make the educational experience of students in Ohio less challenging and less valuable. It is also an invitation to ignore evidence. I have all the respect in the world for politicians (I mean that, they're indispensable to the functioning of democracy), but

their controversies do not determine scientific truth and should not determine what is taught in a classroom.

On a different note, the requirement for intellectual diversity would seem to require economics and business classes to cover the ideas of Marx and Kropotkin in some depth. I have taken a number of economics courses and in them I read exactly one paragraph about Marx and nothing about Kropotkin. I regarded this as acceptable at the time because capitalist economics is the dominant paradigm in the United States, and because it is far more highly developed mathematically than any of its competitors. I would still say that any introductory economics professor that gave equal time to radical left-wing thinkers would be irresponsible. There are many other possible examples. Should the medical school be required to teach alternative medicine? Should physicists be required to give equal time to young earth creationism as an alternative to the Big Bang? Does a course in the novels of Jane Austen need to add something by Charles Dickens for the sake of balance? I should add that in all of the courses that I have mentioned and most others it's difficult enough to fit in the material that is required to give students a straightforward understanding of the subject.

The bill also requires administrators to respond to any complaints about intellectual diversity. Again, how is intellectual diversity defined? It appears to be an invitation to chaos. It would be simple enough for a group of students on either end of the political spectrum to organize and lodge an ongoing series of complaints.

It will be apparent by now that I find it unlikely that SB1 will improve the education of Ohio students, and I find it quite likely that it will degrade that education to some extent. Free speech improves the quality of dialog, and limits on it will degrade the quality and with it the quality of education.

I would add the comparatively minor point that the requirement to gain approval before submitting a grant proposal that includes a diversity component will slow an already cumbersome process. I would also add that the weakening of tenure implied in SB1 will make it more challenging to hire the most qualified faculty members. While I would not expect a mass exodus of Ohio State faculty, it's certainly easy to imagine that some of our most qualified faculty would leave for institutions where their speech is not censored.

A lot of people have put a lot of time and effort into making Ohio State one of the premier educational and research universities in this nation, as reflected in our steady rise in university rankings. SB1 would put that progress at grave risk. This would be bad for our students and for our state. I urge all Senators to vote against this bill.

Sincerely,

Keith Warren