



September 25, 2015

*The AAUP and the Council of University of California Faculty Associations today issued the following statement about remarks made by University of California regent Richard Blum, who is married to US Senator Dianne Feinstein.*

The Council of University of California Faculty Associations and the American Association of University Professors write to protest the following remarks made by University of California regent Richard Blum and then supported by regent Hadi Makarechian during the discussion of a proposed "Statement of Principles Against Intolerance" at the Board of Regents meeting on September 17, 2015:

I should add that over the weekend my wife, your senior Senator, and I talked about this issue at length. She wants to stay out of the conversation publicly but if we do not do the right thing she will engage publicly and is prepared to be critical of this university if we don't have the kind of not only statement but penalties for those who commit what you can call them crimes, call them whatever you want. Students that do the things that have been cited here today probably ought to have a dismissal or a suspension from school. I don't know how many of you feel strongly that way but my wife does and so do I.

These remarks by regent Blum explicitly invoke his wife, US Senator from California Dianne Feinstein, and threaten negative political consequences for the university if the proposed "Statement of Principles Against Intolerance" is not revised so as to be agreeable to him and Senator Feinstein. As such, they violate the spirit, if not the letter, of Article IX, Section 9 of the California Constitution, which declares that "The university shall be entirely independent of all political or sectarian influence and kept free therefrom in the appointment of its regents and in the administration of its affairs."

Whatever varied opinions we may hold on the proposed "Statement of Principles" or any other matter for university discussion, we should all join in rejecting any attempt by a regent to influence university deliberations by calling on external political forces in this manner.

The complex and competing issues involved in developing a suitable "Statement of Principles Against Intolerance" are matters of discussion and intellectual inquiry within the university. The purpose of academic freedom is to protect such inquiry from external political interference, and it is the duty of the members of the Board of Regents to uphold academic freedom and to protect the university from external constraints on this freedom. So it is very troubling to hear a regent make statements that directly undermine free inquiry and the independence of the university. It is particularly disconcerting in this case, because among the central issues are academic freedom and free speech.

We understand that individual regents, in their private capacity, like many others in the community, may hold strong views on this and many other issues. However, in their official capacity, the regents have the responsibility to uphold the rights of university administrators and faculty to determine internal university policies through established processes of shared governance free of external political pressure and threats from any source, including the regents' own spouses, relatives and friends. We call upon the regents, the president, and the provost to provide explicit assurances that they will support and protect the independence and integrity of the continuing discussions of a possible "Statement of Principles Against Intolerance."