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A Concerted Attack on Academic Freedom

Legislators in Missouri and Iowa have introduced legislation that would eliminate tenure for faculty at public institutions in these states. In Missouri, the awarding of tenure would be outlawed for all faculty hired after 2017. In Iowa, tenure would be eliminated even for those who already have it.

The AAUP opposes both pieces of proposed legislation. We applaud the Iowa Board of Regents for speaking out in opposition to the proposal in that state, and we call on the curators of the University of Missouri as well as administrations, faculty, and the public in both states to speak out against these bills and to contact their legislators and urge them to vote against them.

Academic tenure safeguards academic freedom and higher education's contribution to a functioning democracy. In today's political climate, with academics and independent media under attack, what is needed is certainly not less due process or fewer protections for open debate, dialogue, and research.

In fact, it is already the case that many educators lack the protection of tenure. The regressive attacks on tenure that we are now seeing are part of a general attack on education and an educated citizenry. They come hand-in-hand with the defunding of public higher education and are being conducted by the same players who wage right-to-work battles against working people and seek to privatize our public services in a race to the bottom. Recent legislative assaults on higher education in Wisconsin were a model, and they are being replicated by a large network with deep pockets. We saw a collection of legislation that compromised working families' collective bargaining rights, challenged tenure protections, and defunded the public university system.

Faced with these attacks in Wisconsin, students, faculty, and communities organized, and AAUP chapters and staff worked to ensure that regulations were adopted that ameliorated the worst effects of the legislation. The AAUP will continue to engage with our local leaders and individual institutions to push for similar successes. We will continue to join with our colleagues, sisters and brothers in Wisconsin, Iowa, Missouri, and across the country to defend academic freedom, to defend the conditions required for quality education, and to ensure that higher education can serve the common good.