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Political Litmus Tests Have No Place in Higher Ed

The following statement was released today by Rudy Fichtenbaum, AAUP president, and Hank Reichman, AAUP first vice-president and chair of Committee A on Academic Freedom.

Shortly after the 2016 election, the AAUP warned that we could be facing the greatest threat to academic freedom since the McCarthy period. It now appears that such a warning was not misplaced. Extremists in the administration, Congress, and several state houses have created an atmosphere in which "alternative facts" reign supreme, and which encourages the introduction of legislation that threatens the core principles of our democracy.

The latest examples of extreme legislation come from Iowa and North Carolina. In Iowa, a bill has been introduced that would prohibit the hiring of a professor or instructor at a public university or college if his or her most recent party affiliation would "cause the percentage of the faculty belonging to one political party to exceed by 10 percent" the percentage of the faculty belonging to the other dominant party.

In North Carolina, legislation (since tabled) was introduced that would require tenure-track and tenured faculty members to "reflect the ideological balance of the citizens of the state," so that no campus "shall have a faculty ideological balance of greater or less than 2 percent of the ideological balance" of North Carolinians.

Many may rightly believe that initiatives like these cannot pass and that if passed they would be overturned immediately by the courts. However, the introduction of such legislation has a chilling effect. Moreover, implicit in these proposals is the demand that prospective and current faculty members disclose their political affiliations and personal political views as a condition of employment, which is precisely what happened during the McCarthy period.

The AAUP opposes in the strongest terms any legislation that would create an ideological or political litmus test as a qualification for employment as a faculty member at a university or college. Our commitment to academic freedom is rooted in a vision of democracy that thrives on dissent, critical inquiry, free speech, and free research. We will continue to join with other

organizations to resist threats to academic freedom, legislative intrusions into higher education, and harassment of faculty.