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FAIRBANKS FACULTY ASSOCIATION

at the University of Alaska
P.O. Box 80082, Fairbanks 99708

STATEMENT OF THE FAIRBANKS FACULTY ASSOCIATION

ON

ACADEMIC TENURE

REF: HB 879 "An Act prohibiting the Board of Regents from establishing a right of tenure in university and community college professors."

The tenure system in American Universities is occasionally attacked by individuals who either disagree with some particular faculty member or misunderstand the nature of tenure. Tenure is not job security. Tenure instead is a procedure mandating a thorough review of an individual's performance, qualifications, and potential usefulness to the University after a trial period of from five to seven years. The review is a lengthy process involving both peers and administrators. The individual who fails the review, who is not granted tenure, must seek employment elsewhere, and this often is difficult.

The effect of tenure is to deny job security to untenured faculty, which normally means people under the age of about thirty-five. Tenure insures not only that the individual has performed well, but also that the programs and activities in which he is involved are essential to the university. The review considers not only the individual, but also, and to a degree more significantly, the programs in which he is involved. There are cases in which an individual is denied tenure not because of any failure on his part, but because the University finds that it not longer needs his particular discipline or program. In this sense, the tenure system mandates that the University review carefully not only the individual, but also the programs.

After receiving tenure, the individual faculty member is under an obligation to serve the University. The individual accepting tenure makes a professional commitment to the University, one which means not only service, but also a commitment not to resign except under unusual circumstances. This guarantees continuity in faculty and programs, an element vital to the success of academic programs. A tenured faculty member can not simply "quit" as can people in other professions, without incurring serious penalties.

The basis of academic tenure is simply that the individual who is tenured is believed and judged to be competent and effective and to have a significant potential for future service. In addition, the individual

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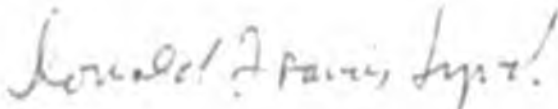
is given the right to speak out on professional matters without fear of political interference. In short, tenure is a guarantee of the right of free speech on professional matters and thereby insures that the individual can pursue the discipline unfettered by political or other pressures. This is vital to academic progress, and to improvement in knowledge. Without it, research can become a mere reinventing of the wheel, or reiteration of the past, with no intellectual progress.

The tenure system is a University's best guarantee of having not only qualified faculty, but also faculty who suit the University's needs and who are committed to serve. This insures the University against dramatic turnovers in critical personnel, it insures students that faculty will perform for the entire academic year, and it insures that the faculty member will be dedicated to higher education.

The University of Alaska has a mission to serve the educational needs of an area one fifth the size of the United States, to pursue research related to regional development in the Arctic and Sub-Arctic, and to provide quality higher education for the future leaders of Alaska. This mission requires not only talented faculty, but also unusual talents, because Alaska is a most unique and special place, both in its environment and its people. The removal of tenure would inevitably lead to a reduction in the quality of both faculty and programs and significantly reduce the capabilities of the University to perform its mission.

Your committee must reject Representative Tony Vaska's bill, as it is a threat to the attempts to build a University in Alaska able to meet the needs of Alaska and Alaskans. The passage of this bill will do major injury to the University.

Sincerely,



Donald Francis Lynch, Ph.D.
President, Fairbanks Faculty Association

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at the University of Alaska
P.O. Box 80082, Fairbanks 99708

March 8, 1982

Representative Michael F. Beirne
Alaska House of Representatives
HESS Committee
Pouch V
Juneau, Alaska 99811

Dear Representative Beirne:

Attached is a statement on academic tenure by the Fairbanks Faculty Association of the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. We request that this statement be included in the record regarding House Bill No. 879, an "Act prohibiting the Board of Regents from establishing a right of tenure in university and community college professors".

This bill should be summarily rejected as it represents an attempt to interfere with a basic University policy which is properly outside the purview of any legislature.

Yours Sincerely,



Donald F. Lynch, Ph.D.
President, Fairbanks Faculty Association
Professor of Geography
University of Alaska
Fairbanks, AK 99701