EDITOR’S NOTE: We often address light-hearted themes in Friday Dispatch. Today, however, we have the unpleasant task and mission of exposing a very serious issue. In fact, we’ve decided to devote today’s Dispatch to a single story, that of the unjust termination of Dr. James Enstrom from his research position of 34 years at UCLA, based on independent research that didn’t accord with the University’s ideological agenda. We think the story is that important.

Last August, we at ACSH were troubled to learn that esteemed scientist and ACSH trustee Dr. James Enstrom had been terminated from his research position in UCLA’s Department of Environmental Health Sciences following a secret faculty vote. After Enstrom’s 34 years of service to the university, what could have led the faculty to such a radical decision?

Well, as it turns out, Dr. Enstrom was told that his research did not align with the academic mission of UCLA’s School of Public Health. The University’s statement is in reference to a peer-reviewed study led by Dr. Enstrom one that challenged previous research by some of his colleagues who claimed that fine diesel particulate matter was associated with an increase in mortality.

The results that Enstrom challenged were used by the California Air Resources Board (CARB), part of the California Environmental Protection Agency, to justify new regulations limiting diesel emissions for trucks, buses, bulldozers, backhoes and other construction equipment. As Dr. Enstrom pointed out, however, such a stipulation would not only impose a huge economic burden on the state’s economy, it also lacked any scientific rationale, since, as his own research demonstrated, there was no association between diesel fuel emissions and mortality.

Furthermore, Dr. Enstrom uncovered the truth about the lead author of the CARB Report that instead of having earned a doctorate in statistics from the University of California, Hien T. Tran had misrepresented his credentials. He actually obtained a Ph.D. by paying $1,000 to a diploma mill called Thornhill University. Dr. Enstrom further pointed out that many of the members on the CARB Scientific Review Panel on Toxic Air Contaminants had exceeded their three-year term limits by decades.

Dr. Enstrom’s important work, however, clearly displeased the UCLA environmental department faculty, resulting in the notice of his termination last year. The school also denied him any further compensation for his work while it raided his research fund accounts. But it would take a lot more to stop Dr. Enstrom, who continued to show up for work without pay over the course of the next year as he fought this unjustified and arbitrary termination through the procedures at UCLA and the University of California system.

When his termination was officially declared, he immediately decided to fight back, suing the university in federal court to regain his position. He has charged UCLA with violating his civil rights.
and suppressing his freedom of speech his academic speech, in this case. He is also relying on the federal whistleblower regulations.

Oddly enough, while UCLA took harsh measures against Dr. Enstrom, the CARB scientist who faked his academic credentials was issued nothing more than a slap on the wrist: He was temporarily suspended for misconduct.

If academic freedom means anything, it should permit a professor to challenge bad science and expose scientific misconduct, points out David French, senior counsel of the American Center for Law and Justice, which is filing the suit on Dr. Enstrom s behalf. Yet UCLA appears more committed to a political agenda than to free and open inquiry.

This case has gained the exposure it has, says ACSH s Dr. Josh Bloom, because it highlights the importance of preserving academic freedom of thought and speech. This is a perfect example of the hypocrisy endemic to our colleges and universities, he says. While every catalog from every college across the country gushes about how their institution is an incubator for the free exchange of ideas and opinions, what they really encourage and support is the free exchange of their opinions. He warns, Careers have been, and continue to be, destroyed when faculty members dare to challenge the status quo. And others who see what has happened to their predecessors are forced to choose between silence, capitulation, or excommunication.

ACSH s Dr. Gilbert Ross finds UCLA s decision to fire Dr. Enstrom reprehensible. This is nothing more than vengeance against an iconoclastic thinker, based purely on a political agenda in the guise of scientific purity, waged against someone who has dared to step outside the party line, he says. And sadly, the damage to his stellar reputation is, at this point, substantial, and perhaps irreversible.

We know that Dr. Enstrom faces a tough battle ahead, but we believe that, unlike that of the UCLA faculty responsible for his termination, his integrity will prevail. As ACSH president Dr. Elizabeth Whelan observes, Dr. Enstrom s case is about more than a single individual; it s about academic freedom, and how it has been imperilled.

In his own words, Dr. Enstrom concludes, "I plan to overturn my wrongful termination from UCLA by continuing to educate Californians about the devastating consequences of politically corrupt science."

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