



State of Connecticut

SENATOR JOHN MCKINNEY

SENATE MINORITY LEADER

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September 19, 2014

Susan Herbst, President
University of Connecticut
Office of the President
352 Mansfield Road, Unit 1048
Storrs, CT 06269-1048

Dear President Herbst:

As a state senator who has supported the University of Connecticut for many years, and who is a proud graduate of the UConn School of Law, I am writing to express my concern regarding recent remarks made by University of Connecticut economics professor, Fred Carstensen. In my opinion, these remarks reveal an inappropriate political bias that crosses the line into partisan advocacy. While Professor Carstensen is free to express his personal opinions and political views, he is not entitled to promote those personal opinions under the official authority of the University of Connecticut or use his title and position at UConn to promote a political candidate or agenda.

According to a Yale Daily News article, Professor Carstensen, when asked for economic analysis, “argued that *if [Tom] Foley was elected in 2010 rather than Malloy, the economy would have been much worse off.*” He went on to say that, “*Foley would have given us the worst recession since World War II...*”

Such conclusory and inflammatory comments hardly amount to objective economic analysis. The statement that Tom Foley would have caused the worst economic recession since World War II is outrageous unsupported hyperbole. How does Professor Carstensen know what steps, other than tax increases, Governor Foley may have taken - such as NOT increasing spending by nearly \$3 billion and instead promoting growth through tax reform to make our tax system simpler, more efficient and more predictable for families and businesses? How can Professor Carstensen justify these comments when statistics show that Connecticut grew more jobs in the 11 months before Governor Malloy took office than during any year under his administration, suggesting that it is his stifling tax increases and anti-growth policies that have stalled our recovery?

Professor Carstensen then went on to endorse Governor Malloy’s spending initiatives and stewardship arguing that, “Malloy has worked to preserve municipal grants and ... Connecticut does not have as high a tax as some ...”

Taken as a whole, Professor Carstensen’s comments are more appropriate fodder for a partisan political rally than an objective economic discussion. The only reasonable conclusion to be drawn is that he endorses Governor Malloy and wants people to believe that Tom Foley would be bad for Connecticut.

State law prohibits state employees from using their official authority or influence to affect the result of an election. In my opinion, by making these remarks under the imprimatur of the University of Connecticut, and using his official title as professor of economics, Professor Carstensen improperly used his official authority to influence an election.

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UConn's code of conduct regarding political activity requires adherence to state and federal election laws. It also prohibits employees from engaging in partisan politics while on state time or using University resources to influence an election. Professor Carstensen was commenting as a UConn economics professor. He was by definition on state time and using University resources, i.e. his title and affiliation. Thus, I believe he likely violated both state law and UConn policy.

UConn's code of conduct rightly notes that, "[w]e depend, as a public institution, upon the support and trust of federal and state officials." As a publicly funded university, UConn has a special obligation to ensure that its resources and title are not used improperly. It also has an obligation to ensure that students are provided a balanced and unbiased education.

Obviously biased comments by a distinguished professor of economics only undermine the public trust and confidence in UConn and its ability to deliver a quality education without political influence. Unfortunately, Professor Carstensen's objectivity has been called into question in the past. While he failed to comment on the potential negative impacts of Governor Malloy's historic tax increases, which have drained billions of dollars from taxpayers' wallets, he readily "volunteered" an alleged economic analysis showing that Malloy's proposed \$50 "tax refund" would create thousands of jobs. Of course, when the Governor had to scrap that plan because of looming budget deficits, Professor Carstensen was again silent.

The legislature has always supported UConn and wants to see it succeed. That support has been bipartisan, and indeed nearly unanimous, including UConn 2000, UConn 21st Century and the UConn Health Center expansion under previous administrations. We all, Republicans and Democrats, take pride in the University and its accomplishments. Thus, it is disheartening to see University representatives engage in partisan pandering.

The recent press conference announcing the findings of a study, paid for by UConn, touting UConn's economic value to the state only adds to my concerns. If, as was stated, the intent was to provide objective information regarding UConn's economic impact to policy makers and legislators in advance of the 2015 legislative session, then there was no need to promote the report prior to the election, when we do not even know who the next Governor will be or the makeup of the next legislature. The fact that UConn chose to promote the report's findings less than two months before the election, and in coordination with Governor and candidate Malloy, fuels the impression of partisanship and political influence.

Both of these recent incidents have the potential to influence an ongoing election and could and should have been avoided. I hope you will take these matters seriously and not only review Professor Carstensen's comments and behavior, but seriously evaluate your University's commitment to political neutrality and fairness.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,



John McKinney
State Senator, 28th District
Senate Minority Leader