

Letter to Representative Tim Walberg, Ranking Member Bobby Scott, and Members of the Committee on Education and the Workforce from Jacqueline Stevens, President, American Association of University Professors, Northwestern University

August 1, 2025

Dear Chair Tim Walberg and Ranking Member Bobby Scott,

I write to share information and concerns relevant to your August 5, 2025 interview with Northwestern University President Michael Schill. I request that this letter be considered and included in any forthcoming reports referencing Northwestern University.

On April 21, 2025, the Faculty Assembly, Northwestern faculty's highest legislative body, passed (338 yes, 83 no) 10 American Association of University Professor (AAUP) chapter sponsored resolutions, the first one stating: "The Board of Trustees, President, Provost, Deans, and the Faculty Senate shall actively defend academic freedom, including by publicly and steadfastly opposing an organized campaign that is bent on restricting our scholarly and public dialogues."¹ Northwestern faculty are outraged that any branch of the government would formally or informally attempt to extort compliance by a private university with viewpoint preferences of a political party or clique therein, in clear violation of the First Amendment. (Your Committee's withdrawal of its requests for records on our colleague Professor Sheila Bedi and her law school clinic in the wake of her lawsuit suggests your attorneys recognize the government's unconstitutional overreach.)²

In the wake of last year's hearings, your Committee, in concert with portions of the U.S. government and Northwestern's board, have leveled a wrecking ball on operations of Northwestern University, in violation of the First Amendment and the Administrative Procedure Act. Actions consequent to your hearings and agency pressure include: a freeze on students' ability to enroll if they do not complete a bogus "training" module that requires assent to statements that are at best controversial;³ the suspension or retraction of hundreds of millions in federal contracts and grants for ridiculous reasons or no stated reasons whatsoever;⁴ the Orwellian wiping of information referencing "diversity" from Northwestern web pages, despite a commitment to "diverse community" still appearing in Northwestern's bylaws' mission statement;⁵ the elimination of

1 Resolutions of the Northwestern Faculty Assembly, April 21, 2025,

https://www.northwestern.edu/faculty-senate/documents/faculty-assembly/faresolution_approved_4.21.25.pdf

2 Lexi Lonas Cochran Zach Schonfeld, "Lawmakers Drop Records Request against Northwestern after Lawsuit," *The Hill*, April 10, 2025, <https://thehill.com/homenews/education/5242635-house-education-committee-northwestern-records-request-dropped/>.

3 Nineth Kanieki Koso, "New Required Bias Training Met with Boycotts from SJP and JVP," *The Daily Northwestern*, March 10, 2025, <https://dailynorthwestern.com/2025/03/10/campus/new-required-bias-training-met-with-boycotts-from-sjp-and-jvp-approval-from-others/>.

4 Leilani Diaz, *Northwestern Federal Funding Frozen despite "Full Cooperation" with Federal Government – North by Northwestern*, April 10, 2025, <https://northbynorthwestern.com/northwestern-federal-funding-frozen-despite-full-cooperation-with-federal-government/>.

5 Jerry Wu, "NU Feinberg Scrubs DEI Webpage," Administration, *The Daily Northwestern*, February 13, 2025, <https://dailynorthwestern.com/2025/02/13/top-stories/nu-feinberg-scrubs-dei-webpage-amid-trumps-executive-orders/>; Northwestern American Association of University Professors Executive Committee, "LTE: NU-AAUP Executive Committee Calls on Northwestern to Stand up to Attacks and Support Education," *The Daily Northwestern*, February 19, 2025, <https://dailynorthwestern.com/2025/02/19/lateststories/letter-to-the-editor-nu-aaup-executive-committee-calls-on-northwestern-to-stand-up-to-attacks-and-support-education/>; Northwestern Board of Trustees, Mission Statement, <https://www.northwestern.edu/about/board-of-trustees/docs/bot-statement-november-bot-final.pdf>.

hundreds of staff positions based on the pretext of funding shortfalls;⁶ the firing of the director of the Gender and Sexuality Resource Center for questioning a directive to remove accurate website content;⁷ and the suspension of Professor Steven Thrasher from teaching and denial of his tenure, in flagrant violation of protections and processes of Northwestern's Faculty Handbook available to those not targeted by your Committee.⁸

I understand that these outcomes will give great pleasure to certain members of your Committee, who will revel in the seeming success of their bullying, the result as much due to their activities as the eager acquiescence of a Northwestern leadership that refuses to listen to much less speak truth to power. The consequences include blatant hypocrisies that are inexplicably disregarded.

Most egregious is the demand to single out one group for a definition of discrimination denounced by members of this very group. On the one hand, House Republicans on this Committee, and several agencies of the executive branch, demand enforcement of a definition of discrimination specific to antisemitism, the controversial International Holocaust and Remembrance Alliance definition imposed for the sole purpose of sustaining the apartheid policies of one country, Israel, a country responsible for war crimes--according to its own former prime minister⁹--and the current starvation of Christians and Muslims, but not Jews, in Israeli-controlled territories,¹⁰ concerns shared across the political spectrum, including by conservatives Tucker Carlson, Candace Owens, and their audiences.¹¹

Members of the Jewish community themselves object to the IHRA definition imposed on university discourse. 118 Northwestern Jewish faculty members proclaimed, "The fact that U.S. government leaders are making unwarranted threats to our university and stripping rights from students, faculty, and researchers nationwide in the name of Jews is deeply offensive to us." They warned that to "punish Northwestern financially or to limit academic freedom in the name of protecting Jewish students could itself spark antisemitism."¹² The

6 Janani Jana, "Northwestern University Cuts 425 Positions amid Trump Funding Freeze," Chicago Sun-Times, July 30, 2025, <https://chicago.suntimes.com/education/2025/07/29/northwestern-university-lays-off-425-amid-trump-funding-freeze>.

7 Beatrice Villaflor, "Former GSRC Director Matt Abtahi Sues NU for Wrongful Termination," Administration, The Daily Northwestern, July 28, 2025, <https://dailynorthwestern.com/2025/07/28/campus/former-gsrc-director-matt-abtahi-sues-nu-for-discriminatory-retaliatory-behavior-culminating-in-termination/>.

8 Northwestern American Association of University Professors Executive Committee, "LTE: NU-AAUP Executive Committee Calls for Prof. Steven Thrasher's Reinstatement," *The Daily Northwestern*, April 11, 2025, <https://dailynorthwestern.com/2025/04/11/opinion/lte-nu-aaup-executive-committee-calls-for-prof-steven-thrashers-reinstatement/>.

9 Isaac Chotiner, "Why Ehud Olmert Thinks His Country Is Committing War Crimes," *The New Yorker*, June 6, 2025, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/why-ehud-olmert-thinks-his-country-is-committing-war-crimes>.

10 Aaron Boxerman, "In a First, Leading Israeli Rights Groups Accuse Israel of Gaza Genocide," *The New York Times*, July 28, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/28/world/middleeast/israel-genocide-gaza-rights-groups.html>; Brian O, "Suffering Christians in Gaza Risk Starvation and Extinction," *Global Christian Relief*, August 2, 2024, <https://globalchristianrelief.org/christian-persecution/stories/suffering-christians-in-gaza-risk-starvation-and-extinction/>.

11 See, e.g., "Tony Aguilar Details the Shocking War Crimes He's Witnessing in Gaza," accessed August 1, 2025, <https://tuckercarlson.com>.

12 "Statement from Jewish Faculty and Staff at Northwestern University," *ACADEME BLOG*, April 23, 2025, <https://academeblog.org/2025/04/23/statement-from-jewish-faculty-and-staff-at-northwestern-university/>.

new mandatory training module on antisemitism, introduced at the demand of the U.S. government, has the potential to do just this.

On the other hand, the same parties demanding universities issue a definition of discrimination for one group only are denouncing policies that provide special benefits based on membership in a specific protected group, claiming such actions "foster intergroup hostility and authoritarianism,"¹³ even though requiring a mandatory training module deferential to some members of one group at the behest of the U.S. government, in violation of the First Amendment, fosters intergroup hostility and is authoritarian.

The pressures on universities to advance the foreign policy priorities of the U.S. government are, alas, not unique to the Trump administration. The estate of a colleague of ours is suing Northwestern for its direct contributions to her suicide, alleging that "the University took away research opportunities and resources from Wu on the basis of her national origin, as she was born in China."¹⁴ Over several years, Northwestern psychologically abused a faculty member with a stellar track record, solely because of her nationality at birth, according to the lawsuit. Affronts and epithets directed by community members against any protected group are reprehensible and deserve redress. But the prioritization of investigating antisemitic name-calling or slurs by Northwestern community members over stanching the administration's own career- and life-ending discrimination is indefensible.

In closing, I respectfully request your committee going forward to: (1) proceed on the basis of a non-partisan interest in promoting higher education conducive to the creation of citizens capable of fully participating in a democracy committed to the rule of law, and thus including in your proceedings stakeholders with interests that diverge from the motives of Northwestern trustees, including in particular the Northwestern chapter of the AAUP; (2) consider legislation that would allow as an alternative to the tax on endowment income a minimum endowment annual expenditures floor of 10%; (3) consider legislation for disclosure requirements that would reveal all past and current comingling of endowment funds with any business endeavor of a donor or trustee, including those occurring via LLCs and trusts; and (4) place a cap on nonprofit salaries per the schedule under the Service Contract Act,¹⁵ thus weakening the leverage of trustees over nonprofit administrators and increasing the loyalty of the latter to the institution's stakeholders, in this case Northwestern's students, faculty, and staff.

The core value of the AAUP, a commitment to the free expression of information and ideas, including those that may be unpopular, is also a core principle of our Constitution and I believe is widely shared by those on your Committee. There are serious conversations to be had about the impact of policy preferences of groups across the political and economic spectrum on our institutions of higher education. My own view is that our universities for quite some time have lacked the independence necessary for prioritizing expertise most beneficial to our citizenry, including prioritizing training on public health policies over

13 "President Trump's America First Priorities," The White House, January 22, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/01/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-protects-civil-rights-and-merit-based-opportunity-by-ending-illegal-dei/>.

14 William Tong, "Northwestern Sued for Role in Suicide of Feinberg Professor," *The Daily Northwestern*, June 26, 2025, <https://dailynorthwestern.com/2025/06/26/campus/estate-of-feinberg-professor-sues-university-for-discrimination-role-in-suicide/>.

15 "SCA WAGE DETERMINATIONS," DOL, accessed August 1, 2025, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/government-contracts/prevailing-wage-resource-book/sca-wage-determinations>.

expensive research leading to patents for Big Pharma, and technologies to operationalize the rule of law instead of nationalism and militarism.¹⁶ I hope both sides can find common ground and work together in order to improve the quality of, and access to, higher education.

Sincerely,

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<https://polisci.northwestern.edu/people/core-faculty/jacqueline-stevens.html>

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16 Jacqueline Stevens, “Opinion | Political Scientists Are Lousy Forecasters,” *The New York Times*, June 23, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/24/opinion/sunday/political-scientists-are-lousy-forecasters.html>.