

February 11, 2016

An open letter to the University of Tennessee President, Joe DiPietro:

We are writing to you as the Executive Committee of the UTK Chapter of the American Association of University Professors to express our profound dismay at the possibility that staff positions at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, may soon be outsourced. This proposal appears to be the product of backroom dealings designed to enrich certain individuals and out-of-state companies at the cost of lost jobs and reduced services on our campus; it most certainly goes against the ideals of transparency and shared governance that faculty at UTK hold dear.

We are specifically requesting that you do not let legislative pressure on other university-related matters—namely the specter of tuition freezes and the threat to defund Diversity programming—affect your decision on outsourcing. Legislative interference in what faculty may or may not say concerning diversity is a very serious threat to our university's mission—not to mention that this and similar legislation may result in our loss of accreditation, thus greatly reducing the value of our students' degrees. But there is a higher principle at stake here, and we are not going to allow ourselves to be manipulated into thinking that we must sacrifice the staff at UTK to save our institution. We also ask that the administration listen carefully to the LGBTQ+ students on our campus, rather than downplaying their legitimate safety concerns in the name of placating the legislature. Needless to say, the unceremonious removal of the gender-neutral pronoun post on the Diversity website did not help matters; we have reposted this effort to instruct all of us as to how to be more inclusive on our chapter's website: <http://web.utk.edu/~aauputk/>.

In short, we are asking you—as a faculty member yourself—to choose the right path for all of us. The solution to the stream of ideologically-driven legislation we are currently facing is to continue to stand up for the values embodied by the UTK faculty, students, and staff. As Benjamin Franklin aptly put it: We must hang together, or we shall assuredly hang separately.

Sincerely,

The UTK Chapter of the AAUP  
Mary McAlpin, President  
Lynn Sacco, Vice President  
Millie Gimmel, Secretary  
Richard Strange, Treasurer  
Laura Howes, Member at Large  
Ben Lee, Member at Large  
Nora Berenstain, Member at Large