



# What if Profs had to pay me for life?

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I wonder how many professors would feel were I granted lifetime employment to expound upon my libertarian ideas – including reducing subsidies for higher education – and they had to pay for it? My guess is they wouldn't be pleased. Nor should they: Why should they be compelled to subsidize the promulgation of my opinions, especially if they disagree with them? And right there you see the problem with tenure, especially at a public institution such as the University of Wisconsin: academics are granted essentially lifetime employment, often to advance ideas for which many of the people paying for their employment – taxpayers – do not care.

Alas, I sense that this flip side of tenure doesn't much enter into debates such as the one burning in Wisconsin, where the legislature is considering curbing statutory employment guarantees at the university. At least I don't sense it if this *Inside Higher Ed* article is any indication. It features loads of lamentations from UW faculty, but nary a peep about serious problems with tenure, including the fact that it fundamentally compels people to support the speech of others.

Why should anyone have guaranteed employment at taxpayer expense? Yes, I know: Tenure protects the ability of academics to freely explore and say unpopular things. But why should academics be granted a privileged position over every other, politically equal, person? And as David French argues in an excellent article tackling both the pros and cons of tenure, “academic independence is a fiction.” How so?

In the real world, leftist groupthink dominates academic departments, conservatives are easily weeded out before tenure – mostly through the hiring process itself – and even many (if not most) tenured dissenting professors live “in the closet” to avoid the social and professional consequences of public disagreement on key cultural or scientific issues.

Of course, guaranteed employment at taxpayer expense would be odious were the thinking group or individual, left or right. The simple fact is that tenure at public institutions is compelled

support of legally privileged speech, and that is not compatible with a free society or equality under the law.

Or maybe you disagree. Thankfully, you don't have to pay me if you do.