Faculty protests KCTCS tenure elimination

PLAN NO-CONFIDENCE VOTE AGAINST BOARD OF REGENTS

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The faculty at Kentucky Community and Technical College System will take the rare step of taking a vote of no confidence in the board of regents in a special meeting at 10:30 a.m. Friday.

Many instructors across the system's 16 schools are upset at the board's decision last month to eliminate the tenure track for their future colleagues hired after July 1.

The faculty will take a secret vote at a meeting conducted via computer conference, according to an e-mail sent to faculty by Astor Simpson, chair of KCTCS faculty and a professor at Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College.

"A vote of no confidence is the most powerful statement that can be made by faculty," Simpson wrote. "And, the decision to pursue this particular means of redress has not been taken lightly."

Giving the board a vote of no confidence is "a public expression of displeasure" that has no legal consequences, said Roy Silver, a sociology professor at Southeast.

Last month, the board voted 10-4 to end the tenure system for new hires. Tenure is used by many colleges and universities and was created to give professors job protection and academic freedom.

Richard Bean, chairman of the KCTCS board of regents, said the system had been hiring more non-tenure professors. This makes the colleges better able to adjust to the economy by bolstering the faculty in growing areas while more easily scaling back elsewhere.

Bean rejected the notion that eliminating tenure might drive away high-quality job candidates. He said tenure isn't needed to protect academic freedom and added that the college system has a process in place to dismiss someone.

"If you're a professor at any school, including KCTCS, and you're getting up every day and doing your job and doing it well, why in the world wouldn't we want to have you around long term?" he said.

He said the faculty has the right to take the vote.

"It will probably hurt some of our feelings if some people were to think that we weren't making the best decisions for the future of the commonwealth and for the students," Bean said.

In a letter to his colleagues, Silver argued that not having tenure could make faculty more subject to the whim of internal academic politics.

"A contract system for faculty can easily be transformed into a patronage system where faculty can be more easily subjected to arbitrary rules, unprofessional governance and lead to producing a revolving door for faculty," he said.

The system employs 5,000 faculty members, of which 890 are tenured and 168 more are on track for tenure.