



NEWS RELEASE

Arizona House of Representatives

Representative Austin Smith (R-29)

1700 West Washington • Phoenix, Arizona • 85007

Wednesday, June 21, 2023

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Representative Austin Smith Calls on Board of Regents to Investigate & Report on Free Speech Concerns at Arizona State University

STATE CAPITOL, PHOENIX – Recent developments at Arizona State University have prompted questions whether free speech is being protected and fairly applied on its campus. State Representative Austin Smith has written a letter to the Arizona Board of Regents, which oversees the state universities, to obtain answers related to recent cases that appear to target and suppress conservative points of view.

“Free speech is paramount to the future of our Republic,” said Representative Smith. **“Higher education taxpayer-funded universities must be held to a higher standard regarding the First Amendment. I am disturbed that this trend continues to happen at Arizona State University. I have asked the Regents to do their job and seek answers immediately from Arizona State administrators.”**

A copy of Representative Smith’s letter to the Regents is attached.

Austin Smith is a Republican member of the Arizona House of Representatives serving Legislative District 29 in Goodyear, Surprise, El Mirage, Youngtown, Wittmann, Morristown, and Allah. He serves as Vice Chairman of the House Natural Resources, Energy & Water Committee and is also a member of the Municipal Oversight & Elections, and Ways & Means Committees. Follow him on Twitter at @azaustinsmith.

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DISTRICT 29

Arizona House of Representatives
Phoenix, Arizona 85007

June 21, 2023

John Arnold, Executive Director
Arizona Board of Regents
2700 N. Central Avenue, Suite 400
Phoenix, AZ 85004

Re: *Free Speech on University Campuses*

Dear Arizona Board of Regents and Director Arnold:

I am writing in my official capacity to express my concern regarding the disturbing trend of apparent free speech suppression at campuses in your charge. The First Amendment protects the right to free speech, and the free speech protections guaranteed under article 2, section 6 of the Arizona Constitution are even more robust than the First Amendment. The ABOR is supposed to be the watchdog of our public universities. The hosting of the Regents Cup, which boasts support for free speech on campus, appears to be an insufficient signal in light of Arizona State University's recent actions.

Within the past year, ASU police arrested and charged student Tim Tizon for handing out copies of the U.S. Constitution on campus. It is my understanding that those charges have finally been dropped. Nonetheless, this student required the services of national free-speech legal advocates, embarrassing the university and the State. Then just this past week, an ASU employee reported in an editorial to the *Wall Street Journal* that at least two employees involved in the arranging of speakers for a career and life advice event were recently terminated.

There appears to have been an a coordinated, campus-wide blowback against the event because of the conservative speakers, driving away donors from the T.W. Lewis Center. I would like to know if this action was used as an excuse to discontinue the position that funded Ann Atkinson's position and what other options besides termination of the program were available. Further, I would like to know the details of the termination of Lin Blake at ASU Gammage.

I respectfully request the Regents to investigate ASU's actions and provide me with a response no later than July 21, 2023. Please contact me if you have any questions and feel free to share any other information that may be relevant to my concerns.¹

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Austin Smith", written over a horizontal line.

Representative Austin Smith

¹ For additional information regarding the House's standard investigative protocols, please visit:
<https://www.azhouse.gov/alispdfs/AZHouseInvestigativeProtocols.pdf>.