

MEETING OF DECEMBER 8, 2017

In the absence of President Lee Bollinger, Executive Committee chair Sharyn O'Halloran (Ten., SIPA) called the Senate to order shortly after 1:15 pm in 501 Northwest Corner Building.

Minutes and agenda. The minutes of November 17 and the agenda were adopted as proposed.

Executive Committee chair's remarks.

Republican tax bill. Sen. O'Halloran invited Sen. Samuel Silverstein (Ten., P&S) to comment on a memo that he had sent to the Senate on this subject.

Sen. Silverstein said he had asked President Bollinger in an email before Thanksgiving to inform the Columbia community of the consequences of the tax legislation that the Republican House and Senate were bringing to a vote. Sen. Silverstein said there were no messages on this subject from the administration before the Thanksgiving holidays. Finally an email went out from CUMC EVP Lee Goldman and Provost John Coatsworth indicating that the University was opposing the tax bills, and was doing all it could in Washington. Sen. Silverstein said the lobbying efforts of the scientific societies and the AAU had been weak. He said the tax bills threaten to destroy the educational system of the United States. He invited fellow senators to join him in preparing a resolution for action at the next plenary to ask the administration to provide an accounting of the costs of the tax bill in its final form to the University and its population starting in 2018.

Sen. Silverstein offered some rough calculations of his own:

--Student loan interest will increase by between \$850 and \$5,600 a year for Columbia graduates with jobs paying between \$50K and \$100K.

--If the tuition exemption for graduate research assistants is treated going forward as implicit income, then they will each see a tax increase of about \$18K a year. And faculty and staff who have two children at Columbia College will see their taxes increase over four years by \$84K to \$202K.

--The University stands to lose 1.4 percent of the interest on its endowment, which might be as much as \$19 million a year, or about 180 full-time scholarships. Sen. Silverstein said 180 may not sound like great many scholarships, unless you're one of the students who has one.

Sen. Silverstein turned to the issue of the deductibility of state and local taxes. If the tax bill eliminates that deductibility, he said, the impact on K-12 education will be staggering. He asked fellow senators who attended public schools if they thought they'd be at Columbia today if their schools had been as under-resourced as so many public schools are today. Sen. Silverstein said he had been Google-searching for a month now, and he hadn't found a single president of any university who had commented on the impact of the present tax bill on public education. Sen. Silverstein said his point was to warn about the impact on the diversity of the Columbia student

of any further erosion in support for public education. He said the situation was a crisis--a war against the children of this country.

Sen. Silverstein said the best description of what was now happening in education could be found in a "A Nation at Risk," a 1983 report by Terrel Bell, Ronald Reagan's Secretary of Education: "If an unfriendly foreign power attempted to impose on America the educational performance that exists today, we might have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands we've allowed this to happen to ourselves. We have in effect been committing an act of unthinking unilateral educational disarmament."

Sen. Silverstein also called for a second resolution, asking the President and the Trustees to stand up and say something about the current situation. He said the din from protests by the presidents of all the colleges and universities in this country should be a cacophony, but it's not. He said Columbia senators should start the revolution here by asking the president to actually display the kind of leadership this country needs.

Sen. Silverstein invited interested senators to join him in this effort at the end of the session.

Sen. Robert Pollack (Ten., A&S/Natural Sciences) asked for clarification of the cost to the University of the 1.4 percent tax on endowment income that Sen. Silverstein had mentioned.

Sen. O'Halloran said the tax would be on the payout from Columbia's billion endowment, whose value is now about \$10 billion. The payout is roughly 4 percent, or \$400 million. A 1.4 percent tax on that amount would cost about \$5.6 million.

Sen. Julia Hirschberg (Ten., SEAS) said final passage of the tax bill was imminent. Wouldn't it be too late for the Senate to weigh in at the next plenary, in February 2018?

She said it would be too slow for people to give their addresses to Sen. Silverstein after the meeting. She suggested circulating Sen. Silverstein's email and having senators contact him.

Sen. O'Halloran invited Loftin Flowers, Associate Vice President for Government Affairs, to comment.

Mr. Flowers offered brief comments. He anticipated that in the next week and a half the House and Senate versions of the tax bill would be reconciled, including some vital differences between them with important consequences for higher education. He thanked Sen. Silverstein for his comments, and said many people at Columbia share his sense of the gravity of the situation. Speaking as one of the people on the front lines of Columbia's response to the current tax bill, along with peer institutions and national organizations in Washington, he said he thought the response had been quite strong in many respects. He said he did not think Columbia's efforts were weak, adding that his own perspective was only one of many. He said he had not prepared a presentation for the present meeting, but would be happy to come back and speak more formally to this group or perhaps a smaller one, such as the External Relations Committee.

Sen. Silverstein said he thought the most useful step for students to take would be to call their parents, and ask them to call friends and relatives, and to have all of them call members of Congress and senators from their own states. He said most legislators don't pay much attention to written comments from people who are not their actual constituents.

Sen. O'Halloran said relevant information could be circulated.

Student Affairs Committee co-chair Sonya Nanda (Bus.), asked if there was anything the Executive Committee could do with so little time remaining.

Sen. O'Halloran said there could be a resolution at the present meeting, which would have to be referred to a committee, probably External Relations. She said she would be willing to work with External Relations to push something out. But that would be too late for the present legislation.

Sen. O'Halloran said it was important for her to be careful not to be taking sides on these different issues, but to make sure people have an opportunity to advocate their position, whatever it is. Affording their constituents this opportunity is a valuable function for senators to perform. She said senators' franking privileges—their authority to communicate with their constituencies by mass emails in an informative but non-political way—would serve a valuable function in this situation.

Old business.

- Resolution to approve the Faculty Affairs Committee Report on Academic Freedom (Faculty Affairs). Faculty Affairs Committee co-chair Letty Moss-Salentijn (Ten., CDM) she and her co-chair Robert Pollack wanted to bring their resolution for action at the present meeting. But she said the resolution was still under discussion between the Faculty Affairs and Student Affairs committees, and would benefit from one—but no more than one—more postponement, with a date certain for action of February 23, 2018, the second plenary of the spring semester.

Sen. Moss-Salentijn said she hoped to have the resolution ready sooner, but a positive deliberative process was under way, and the FAC co-chairs wanted to allow it to take its course.

In response to a question, Sen. Moss-Salentijn stressed that the “date certain” would be the final deadline, but that the resolution could be ready for action before then.

Sen. Pollack saw an opportunity to exemplify the spirit of the resolution through cooperation with student colleagues. He said the resolution concerns the principles underlying academic freedom, not the rules in place to protect those principles. He said those principles apply to students and faculty equally, and it would be a mistake for Faculty Affairs to tell students, These are our principles; live with them. Sen. Pollack said he was asking student colleagues to take Faculty Affairs as seriously as that committee had taken them, and it was his impression that students were doing that. He hoped Student Affairs and Faculty Affairs would come back to the Senate together with a joint resolution.

Sen. Nanda seconded the motion to table the resolution again, with a date certain for its return to the plenary of February 23, 2018.

The Senate then approved the motion in a vote by show of hands, without dissent but with one abstention.

Committee reports.

Update from Students Affairs on its quality-of-life survey. Sen. Nanda began by thanking Sens. Pollack and Moss-Salentijn for their remarks on the academic freedom resolution. She said that it takes a lot to admit to some of the things they had acknowledged, and students really appreciated the generosity of their work together.

Sen. Nanda said she was now going to present some preliminary data from the quality-of-life survey, but not the analysis of what is behind the data. That would come at a later plenary this year. She referred closely to [slides](#) that SAC had prepared on the survey.

At the end of the presentation Sen. Shelley Saltzman (NT, SPS) asked to hear more about international students in any follow-up presentation.

Sen. Nanda said Student Affairs would include this information in a more comprehensive, detailed version of the present report toward the end of the spring semester.

Sen. Andreas Hielscher (Ten., SEAS) asked whether the 36 percent response rate overall was consistent across the schools.

SAC co-chair Joshua Schenk (CC) said there was significant variation among the schools. In the next presentation SAC would break down some of the data by school. He added that levels of satisfaction were pretty consistent across schools.

Sen. Irving Herman (Ten., SEAS) said the way numbers are plotted can have an impact on different audiences. He suggested giving a plot that shows a whole range of variables, and another one that highlights differences.

Sen. Nanda appreciated the suggestion.

Sen. Pollack said one of the slides showed an impressive linear relationship linking increased happiness with increased family income. He asked to hear about how that result would figure in SAC's recommendations. He said his own suspicion was that students at Columbia with very low family income often don't get enough food. And their financial aid may not entirely cover their food plan. Sen. Pollack said he had dealt with students on such issues. He asked SAC to move that question up on its priorities list.

Sen. Nanda called on Sen. Ramond Curtis (Stu., GS) to report briefly about the food bank for students. She added that SAC takes this issue very seriously, and has formed a new subcommittee focused on socioeconomic status. She added that while students can make an important contribution on this issue, it was essential to have leadership from the administration, particularly the Office of Undergraduate Life, because this message has got to come from the top down. She said the university must make clear that this is a place where all walks of life can enjoy the campus and the opportunities here.

Sen. O'Halloran said Scott Wright, Vice President for Campus Services, had established a program enabling students to transfer and donate extra meals on their meal cards. Sen. O'Halloran said efforts are underway, but she agreed that food security is an acute issue for a small number of students.

Sen. Curtis that the hunger problem is not confined to a small group of students. He said Columbia is actually closer to the national average in the number of students dealing with hunger. He said the food bank has been working on this problem since the spring of 2016. It finally received permanent space. It has been working with Scott Wright's office because he saw the food bank as a way to deal more efficiently with the hunger problem.

Sen. Curtis said that since the food bank had acquired permanent space, it had increased disbursements by approximately 450% over the previous year, when it had to handle all requests online. The food bank is open hours two a week. It has completed about 620 disbursements overall, 400-450 this semester, after it received the help of a mass email from SAC to the student body, and some other promotional efforts. The food bank has also made a serious effort to involve as much of Columbia and its alumni population as possible. He said the Senate could help by providing input on policy support to ensure that the administration is actively ensuring the sustainability of the food bank. Alumni and outside organizations and corporations can help provide a sustainable donation base, because right now the food bank is funded almost completely from student funds—a source Sen. Curtis hoped to eliminate.

Sen. Curtis said the food bank effort is just brushing the surface of the problem, but it is collecting data anonymously from every single person who receives a disbursement, in order to track the school usage and the vegetarian usage, and to learn how many students with families are coming in. These data are critical for understanding the student body dealing with hunger.

Sen. Curtis welcomed feedback from the Senate about how to reach out to the administration. But he said things were moving rapidly. Outside donors are taking part. He said he and the other co-founder of the food bank want it to become part of the narrative of Columbia, so that nobody feels that they have to ask the food bank for permission to host a food drive, host a fundraiser, or write an op-ed. They should interact with the food bank to get more information, but they should also feel free to proceed on their own.

Sen. O'Halloran said it would be valuable for the food bank to link up with existing programs such as Community Impact.

Sen. Silverstein called for finishing up with this issue.

Sen. Eli Noam (Ten., Bus.) asked what the median annual household income of Columbia students is, and how it has shifted over time. Sen. Nanda said SAC didn't have that information, but would seek it.

Sen. Regina Martuscello (Research Officers) asked about the meaning of the bars with plus or minus percentages in the graphs that SAC was presenting. Sen. Nanda said those percentages

were comparisons to 2015. When SAC made a preliminary presentation to the Trustees, Board members asked to see those comparative figures on the slide.

Sen. Martuscello suggested putting a small annotation on the bottom of the slide to explain the percentages.

Returning to an earlier question, Sen. Herman asked how SAC had gathered information about students' household income. Do students actually know their family income, or are they guessing? Does the student fill out a survey? He said self-reported information suggests a degree of uncertainty about the data. He never knew his own parents' income.

Sen. Nanda said that was correct. Students typically report a range of family income.

Sen. O'Halloran said many students whose annual family income is below \$200,000 have to fill out financial aid forms. So they might see these family income numbers there.

Sen. Curtis noted that a significant fraction of the students responding to the question on family household income are married, with children, and therefore outside their parents' households.

Sen. O'Halloran said again that SAC was reporting only the top-line numbers now, and would go into greater depth later in the year. They would also provide breakdowns for the various schools, and present some of their findings to deans.

Sen. Silverstein's initiative on the tax bill. Sen. Silverstein asked if there could be a sense of the Senate statement on the issue he had raised at the start of the meeting.

Howard Jacobson, the parliamentarian, said there could not be a sense of the Senate resolution.

Sen. O'Halloran said that in that case the Senate would just have to follow its regular process for bringing a resolution to the floor.

There being no further business, Sen. O'Halloran adjourned the meeting at around 2 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Mathewson, Senate staff