

Senate meeting March 2nd.

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I have asked to bring the matter of the appointment of Retired Lt. Colonel Eikenberry for discussion in the Senate because I believe that our most important task as Senators is to protect the interests and rights of the faculty. When a search overseen by the central administration produces an appointment that a large number of faculty finds unacceptable, and when an appeal to the central administration to reconsider, signed by 67 faculty members, falls on deaf ears, it seems only appropriate that the Senate will look into the matter.

The search we are discussing here is for the Leader of the newly endowed Buffett Institute for Global Studies—the word “leader” is the one used in the job description posted by the administration. This description makes clear the great importance for the university as a whole of both the Buffet Institute and its leader. The role of the leader would be to articulate the vision for the Buffet Institute and, through it, the entire university’s global perspective. As appropriate for the leader of an relatively large, interdisciplinary research center, the ideal candidate would be someone with extensive administrative experience as well as demonstrated ability to raise funds and interact with institutions and bodies outside the university. The description specifies that for this leadership position, and I am quoting, “An appreciation for the Institute’s academic mission and values; a strong track record of significant and sustained research and publication in international affairs is preferred, as is related teaching experience.”

There is evidence that some members of the search committee appointed for this search did not think that Rtd Lieutenant Colonel Eikenberry fits the job description. He certainly does not have a strong record—indeed any record—of significant and sustained research and publication; nor does he have much of a teaching experience. At the same time, there is one sentence in the job description that sounds as if it was written expressly to make his hiring technically possible regardless of his lack of research record--the sentence stating that “The position may or may not be filled by a tenured professor.”

Whatever reservations were expressed in the search committee, it seems as though they were ignored, as were ignored the protests of faculty members once it was announced that he is the finalist for the position. This lack of interest in hearing and engaging with opposing opinions strongly suggests that the administration had their candidate picked up in advance of the search and are intent on imposing their will. In such a situation, insistence on confidentiality starts looking like a deliberate lack of transparency. I would like therefore to urge the Provost to lift the vow of secrecy imposed on the search committee so that we can have access to accounts of the process, others than the ones given by the central administration. I would like also to urge the Provost to provide us with full information about the visits of the two finalists, Cowley and Eikenberry, especially which committee members, faculty members, Trustees, etc. they met.

By deciding that the new leader of the Buffet Institute will have the title of Executive Director, the central administration sought to circumvent the whole issue of the candidate's credentials for joining the NU faculty, presenting the position as an administrative one. There are two problems with such a claim: first, academic units are not governed—and should not be governed—by administrators; second, the suggestion that this is a purely administrative position cannot be taken seriously, given the expansive job description. An Executive Director will not do.

Over 130 people signed a petition, posted online two days ago, against the Eikenberry's appointment; they include faculty members, graduate students, alumni, and scholars in other institutions. The signatories dwell on Eikenberry's unsuitability for the job; they deplore the lack of transparency of the process. They express the opinion that the academic credibility and independence of the Buffett Institute will be severely jeopardized by the appointment, as will be the reputation of Northwestern as a serious research institution.