

We, the faculty of The Evergreen State College, are concerned about the emergence of a climate in which academic freedom is increasingly seen as a qualified right, subject to political, cultural or commercial considerations. Academic freedom, which endows members of the university with the right to hold, express and teach any views they deem fit, and to research and publish their findings without restraint, is widely recognized as essential to the pursuit of knowledge. In order to flourish, university life needs to be an environment where people are prepared to search for the truth, wherever it may lead and whomever it may offend. Intellectual and scientific breakthroughs inevitably challenge the prevailing order, which is why those who make them frequently face repression and the attention of the censor. This should not be seen as some eccentric, outdated right. Everyone benefits from the exercise of this freedom; it helps promote the development of science and knowledge, which benefits the whole of society. We believe that the citizens of Washington State support the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution as a core value of our society, and support its importance to a free and open society.

In the last couple of weeks, there has been a huge volume of criticism of Professor Ward Churchill, University of Colorado at Boulder, for his written remarks describing the attacks of September 11, 2001. Churchill's invitation to speak at Hamilton College in New York has met extreme opposition, partly orchestrated by television commentators. The governor of New York wrote a protest letter to the Hamilton College president describing Churchill as a "bigoted terrorist supporter." Hamilton President Joan Hinde Stewart described the more than 6,000 email messages she received against Churchill as "ranging from angry to profane, obscene, violent." The governor of Colorado asked Professor Churchill to resign one day; on the next, he demanded that Churchill be fired. The professor and his wife have received more than 100 death threats. Fearing violence, the Hamilton College administration has now cancelled Churchill's talk.

We, the faculty of The Evergreen State College, strongly support, along with the American Association of University Professors, the principle of academic freedom in the colleges and universities of this country. Although some of us find Churchill's views distasteful and objectionable, we believe this has no bearing on his right to express his views in the manner he chooses. We deplore, also, the threats of violence directed at Professor Churchill and his wife because of his exercise of free speech. We believe that academic freedom is in jeopardy when high-ranking state political figures interfere with the autonomy of state institutions of higher learning by demanding sanctions for exercise of free speech.

The attacks on Professor Ward Churchill are part of the growing intolerance towards those who oppose the war in Iraq and U.S. foreign policy. Arab-American, Arab and Muslim faculty have been singled out for harassment at several universities including Columbia University. We strongly condemn this. We also oppose how attacks on Professor Churchill have been used to attack ethnic studies departments as Churchill is a faculty member and former head of the ethnic studies department at the University of Colorado, Boulder. We support ethnic studies departments in general and the UC Boulder one in particular.

We request that Washington State Governor Christine Gregoire and the presidents of the state's

colleges, including the Evergreen State College, take a strong, public stand reaffirming their commitment to academic freedom in Washington State. We ask, as well, that they strongly condemn the threats of violence issued against faculty or any others who may take a controversial stand in their academic work.