

Subject: April 5, 2017 Message from Vice Provost John Geer regarding unionization
Date: Wednesday, April 5, 2017 at 4:00:37 PM Central Daylight Time
From: Vice Provost John Geer (sent by owner-spring2017_provost@list.vanderbilt.edu <owner-spring2017_provost@list.vanderbilt.edu>)
To: Vice Provost John Geer

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to update you on our recent unionization activities concerning our non-tenure track faculty. Specifically, late last night, the university filed a new motion with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to withdraw from the election agreement with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 205. The reason behind this reversal of course is simple: the SEIU acted in bad faith and withheld information from us during recent negotiations with them.

To say we are disappointed with the union's actions would be an understatement. After lengthy discussions with the union following the end of the hearings, we came to what we thought was an important compromise. In return for the removal of non-tenure track faculty whose appointments are in Peabody and Blair from the bargaining unit, Vanderbilt agreed to move forward with an election and included some full-time non-tenure track faculty in A&S and Divinity to be part of the unit.

We had long opposed including any full time non-tenure track faculty in the bargaining unit. We believe these faculty are critical to shared governance. But in the spirit of cooperation and collaboration, we decided to compromise.

A compromise in the classic sense is to give up something you very much value so you can move forward together. We did just that. Yet, on March 29 – the very same day the NLRB approved the agreement – the SEIU filed a second petition seeking to represent a substantial number *of the very faculty excluded from the unit in the agreement*. During the negotiations over the agreement, the union withheld the truth and failed to disclose its intent to file the second petition. They were not, in other words, really interested in compromise and cooperation.

Obviously, we made a mistake by trusting the union to negotiate in good faith. With this breach of trust by the union, we are filing a legal motion to try to get back to where we were before the parties signed the agreement. We wanted compromise. We wanted to move forward—together. The union, alas, did not. It is regrettable that we are forced to take this action.

As we work through this process, affected faculty will continue to get messages from Provost Wentz and the deans about unionization, about the election, and other matters as they arise. We do not know what action the NLRB will take in response to our motion. The election for non-tenure-track faculty in Arts and Science and Divinity may well proceed, and if it does, we want everyone in the unit to vote and we want faculty to be informed about that vote. It is important for all of us to understand the implications of the union acting in bad faith, both for the upcoming election (if it happens) and how the union might represent our colleagues in future negotiations.

Thanks for your time in this important matter.

Sincerely,

John Geer
Vice Provost for Academic and Strategic Affairs

