

STATE

Dade Phelan breaks from Dan Patrick on ending tenure for new Texas professors

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Texas House Speaker Dade Phelan, R-Beaumont, said Friday that he opposes Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick’s proposal to [end tenure](#) for all new professors at Texas public universities and to revoke tenure for faculty who teach critical race theory, a college-level framework for studying racism in society.

Back in February, Patrick, who presides over the Texas Senate, [pledged](#) to push the proposal during next year’s legislative session.

When questioned about his stance on the issue during the Texas Tribune Festival on Friday, Phelan said, “I respectfully disagree” with Patrick, adding that he’s gotten feedback that Patrick’s proposal would make it more difficult for universities to recruit professors with conservative viewpoints, who benefit from the protection tenure provides for professors to freely and openly share their ideology.

More: [Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick pledges to end tenure for new hires at Texas public universities](#)

The disagreement between Phelan and Patrick sets up a possible clash over the issue between the two chambers of the Legislature during the next legislative session.

Brian McCall, chancellor of the Texas State University System, said during a panel Friday at the Texas Tribune Festival that he didn’t believe lawmakers would eliminate tenure because it would “put the state at such a disadvantage.”

“Tenure exists for a reason, and that is to get thought out,” McCall said. “We’re not running Vacation Bible School. We’re teaching physics and various things that are science and not subject to certain opinions.”

Patrick had made his announcement on the proposal in response to a nonbinding [resolution](#) from the University of Texas Faculty Council affirming their academic freedom to teach about race, gender justice and critical race theory.

More: [Texas Gov. Greg Abbott stops short of backing Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick’s idea to end tenure](#)

Several free speech advocacy groups and Texas faculty organizations have condemned Patrick’s proposal, arguing that it would make Texas public universities less competitive, discourage prospective faculty members from moving to the state, and limit people’s First Amendment rights.

UT President Jay Hartzell and other university leaders [have publicly defended](#) the importance of tenure and academic freedom at universities in the months since then, although rarely — if ever — have they addressed Patrick directly in their comments.

Hartzell said [during his annual State of the University address on Tuesday](#) that academic freedom must be preserved at UT and that tenure allows UT’s faculty “to focus on the incredible rather than the incremental.” He also shared [a public statement](#) earlier in the year that said removing tenure would “cripple” Texas’ ability to recruit and retain great faculty members.

Tenure “is an essential tool for attracting world-class scholars that enables them to take risks on big ideas, work on the hardest problems society faces and strive for profundity, not simply production,” Hartzell said in his speech Tuesday. “Public research institutions have not wavered in protecting tenure, because it provides time and freedom to cultivate world-changing ideas.”

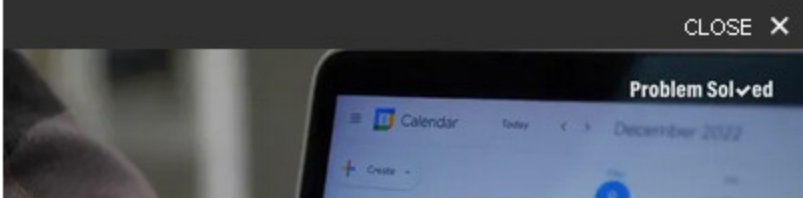
Under the current [state education code](#), tenured faculty members at an institution are subject to evaluations “no more often than once every year, but no less often than once every six years.” The code says tenure can be revoked for “incompetency, neglect of duty, or other good cause.”

Guidelines for the UT System Board of Regents, as well as other university systems in Texas, state that faculty members have the freedom in the classroom to discuss classroom subjects. The UT System guidelines say faculty are expected not to introduce controversial matters into their teaching if they have no relation to their subjects.



House Speaker Dade Phelan Bob Daemrich/CapitolPressPhoto

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