

July 1, 2024

Dr. Credence Baker
Chief of Staff and Vice President for University Strategy
Tarleton State University
via email: cbaker@tarleton.edu

Dr. James Hurley
President, Tarleton State University
c/o Ms Tauna Bradfield, Executive Assistant to the President
via email: bradfield@tarleton.edu

Dr. Diane Stearns
Provost and Executive Vice-President for Academic Affairs
Tarleton State University
via email: aaffairs@tarleton.edu

Dear Drs. Hurley, Stearns, and Baker:

The American Historical Association expresses deep concern about Tarleton State University's decision not to renew the contract of Ted Roberts, a "Senior Instructor" who has been employed on a continuous basis for long enough that non-renewal should have a performance or budget-based rationale.

It is apparent from numerous media reports that Roberts' contract was not renewed because he challenged the University President, rather than because of his qualifications or job performance. As a Senior Instructor, Professor Roberts has been teaching five courses per semester, earning high marks for his teaching, with students commenting on his high expectations, excellent support, and exemplary approach to history education in general. Roberts advises and mentors ROTC students who respected and admired him for his own service in the U.S. Army. Professor Roberts supervisor, Dr. Jensen Branscombe, never gave Professor Roberts any indication that his performance as an instructor and department member was anything but "dependable, hardworking, and upstanding." She expected his contract to be renewed and needed the required courses Roberts taught to be staffed.

According to media reports, the non-renewal was instead the outcome of an event unrelated to Mr. Roberts performance as a member of the faculty. Tarleton University President Dr. James Hurley reportedly invited faculty and staff to an open meeting to "voice concerns and propose solutions." Professor Tarleton raised the issue of parking availability and fees, a concern

important for many staff and faculty. He presented some data about costs other places, and President Hurley disputed some of Roberts' numbers in an exchange that was "tense but cordial." Several weeks later, however, Roberts was fired by Provost Stearns because such behavior toward President was "intolerable" and "defamatory." Professor Roberts, the Faculty Senate, and the History Department all protested this surprising decision.

The AHA objects to Tarleton University's decision to fire a faculty member for comments made outside of the context of his university employment and extraneous to his role as teacher and historian. Firing a faculty member who has been renewed every year is a clear violation of standard university practices as is not providing a year's notice. Such notice is standard for the Texas A & M system that hires hundreds of visiting professors, lecturers, and adjuncts each year. Such unprofessional and capricious firing will hurt Texas A& M's reputation as a reliable employer and as an institution that provides an education for Texas's future leaders and military officers.

Professor Roberts' decision to speak up, when he was invited, to improve how Texas A & M operates is part of being a professional. Such professional behavior does not merit being fired.

The American Historical Association is the largest association of professional historians in the world. Our almost 11,000 members include college professors, secondary school teachers, advanced students, and public historians working in museums, national parks, and innumerable other venues. The professional standards we articulate and promote are cited frequently inside and outside the academy. Prominent among those standards is the right of historians to express their opinions, and to work to make institutions better for students and staff who learn and work there.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James Grossman", with a stylized, cursive script.

James Grossman
Executive Director