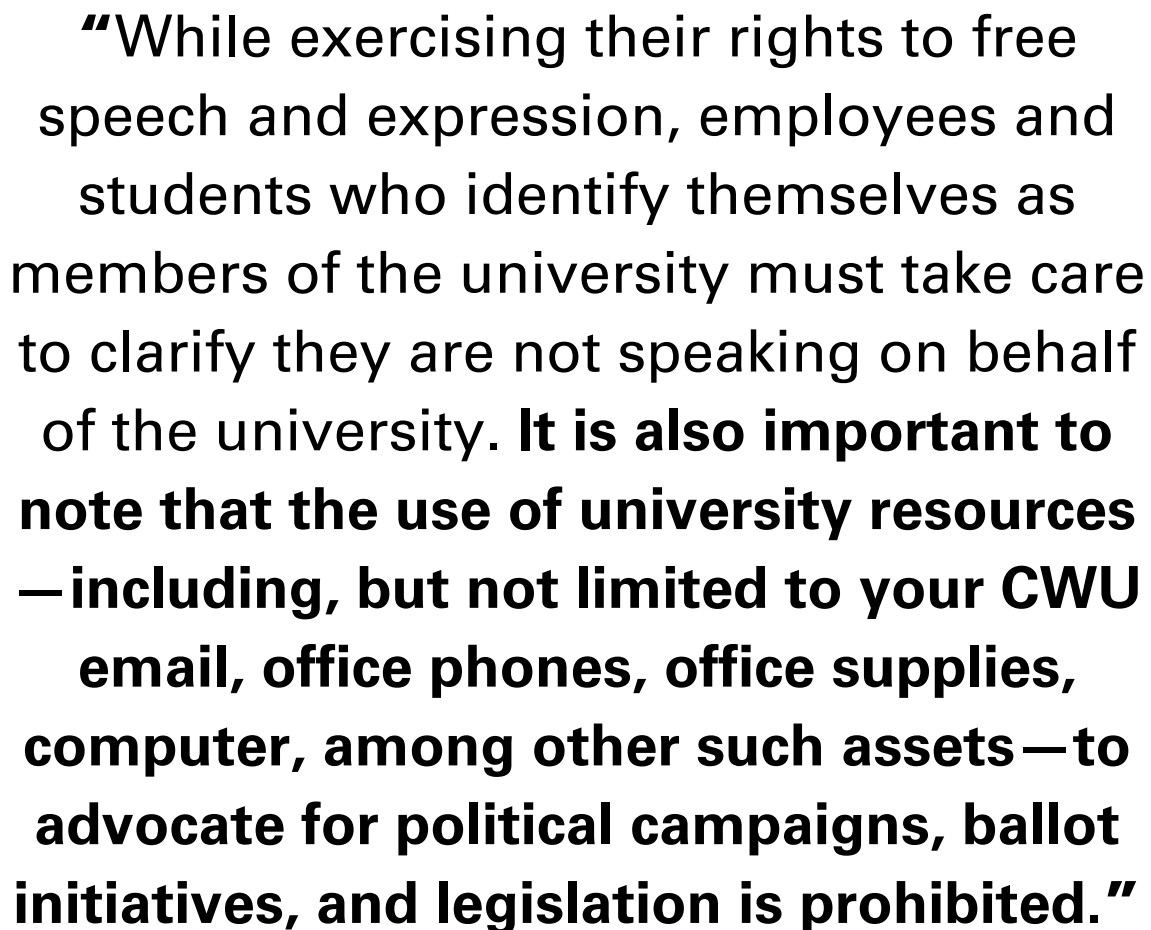


Am I a University Resource?



**Questions of free political speech at
Central Washington University**

On May 16, 2024, Central Washington University president Jim Wohlpart sent a mass email to all university email addresses following a news story about their financial ties to Boeing, a corporation that manufactures weapons which fuel the genocide of Palestinians. This is abhorrent, but not the point I intend to make. What stuck out to me was the following statement:



“While exercising their rights to free speech and expression, employees and students who identify themselves as members of the university must take care to clarify they are not speaking on behalf of the university. **It is also important to note that the use of university resources—including, but not limited to your CWU email, office phones, office supplies, computer, among other such assets—to advocate for political campaigns, ballot initiatives, and legislation is prohibited.**”

Just the night prior, I wore my “Cats at the Capitol” shirt to bed. When I attended a university event to lobby representatives at the Washington State capitol, did we not use university resources? Did my shirt not cost university money? Did we not travel in a van from university motorpool? If I work for the university, am I a university resource?

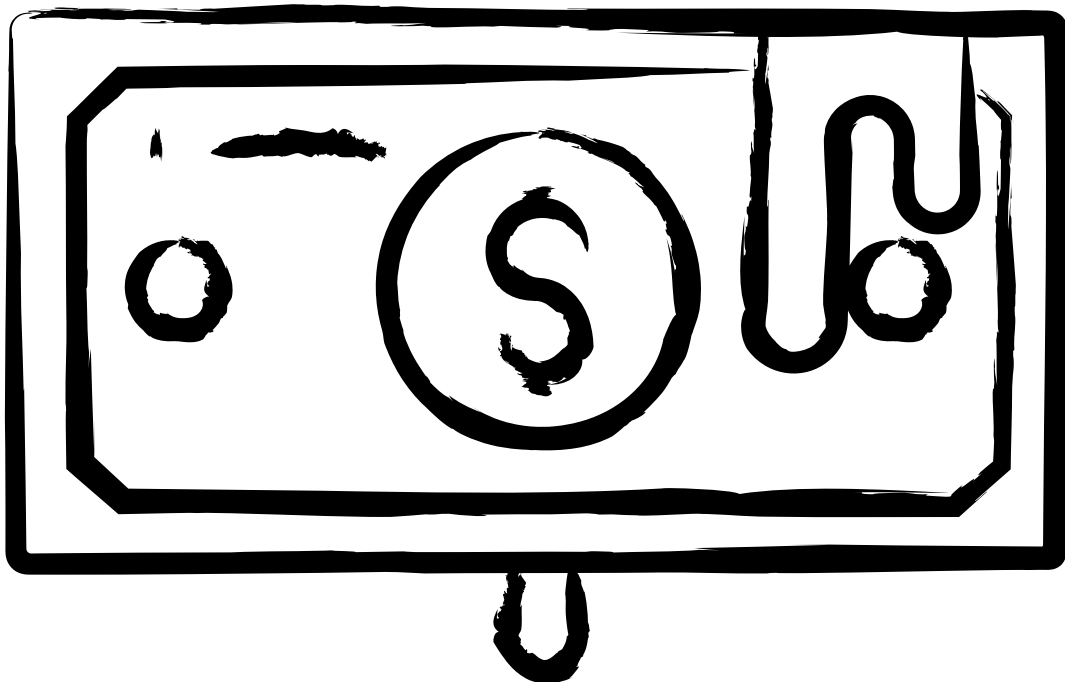


Furthermore, what does “prohibited” mean in this context? Will I be fined? Fired? Expelled? Given a stern talking to? Or... sued? Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 42.17A.635 states:

“...(2) Unless authorized by subsection (3) of this section or otherwise expressly authorized by law, no public funds may be used directly or indirectly for lobbying. However, this does not prevent officers or employees of an agency from communicating with a member of the legislature on the request of that member; or communicating to the legislature, through the proper official channels, requests for legislative action or appropriations that are deemed necessary for the efficient conduct of the public business or actually made in the proper performance of their official duties. This subsection does not apply to the legislative branch.

(3) Any agency, not otherwise expressly authorized by law, may expend public funds for lobbying, but such lobbying activity shall be limited to (a) providing information or communicating on matters pertaining to official agency business to any elected official or officer or employee of any agency or (b) advocating the official position or interests of the agency to any elected official or officer or employee of any agency. Public funds may not be expended as a direct or indirect gift or campaign contribution to any elected official or officer or employee of any agency. For the purposes of this subsection, "gift" means a voluntary transfer of any thing of value without consideration of equal or greater value, but does not include informational material transferred for the sole purpose of informing the recipient about matters pertaining to official agency business. This section does not permit the printing of a state publication that has been otherwise prohibited by law.”

So in summary, university funds are allowed to be spent on political matters only if the university deems it appropriate. Students may be the heart and soul of the university, but we do not have a say in the causes we support. And as it stands, that means we accept blood money from Boeing.



Even still, this only applies to the public funds. What about private donations? What about our tuition? I pay the technology fee; the computer on which I write this is not publicly funded. If private and public funds are pooled together in the university budget, who is to say which assets were funded privately or publicly?



All of this is yet another way that CWU boils down activism to what is most palatable. The reality is that change is not made in sanitized workshops bearing the university's stamp of approval. Change is not made in months of deliberation over a mission statement. Change is made when people are free to speak on what matters to them and call out injustice when it arises; using university resources or not.