



SPEECH FIRST

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Speech First Sues Iowa State University Challenging Three Policies that Chill Student Speech

“Iowa State University maintains a series of policies that have both the purpose and the effect of chilling student speech. One month out from a major political primary, students have been significantly – and unconstitutionally – burdened from participating in the political process.”

– Nicole Neily, President and Founder of Speech First

Ames, IA. — Speech First, a nonprofit membership association working to combat restrictions on free speech and other civil rights at colleges and universities across the United States, filed a lawsuit this afternoon against Iowa State University — *Speech First v. Wintersteen et. al* — in the United States District Court for the Southern District of Iowa as part of its efforts to help restore free speech and expression to America’s universities.

Through the use of three policies – a ban on chalking, a prohibition on student emails related to campaigns and elections, and a Campus Climate Reporting System – Iowa State University has created an elaborate investigative and enforcement regime designed to chill speech concerning political and social issues of public concern.

Speech First student members at Iowa State University are significantly burdened from participating in the political process because of the bans on chalking and sending emails in support of candidates. “The state of Iowa is a major destination for presidential candidates, who are on or near campus on a regular basis,” said Speech First president Nicole Neily. “Many students learn about meet-and-greet events because events have traditionally been promoted through chalking – and by banning these advertisements and emails, students are missing out on major civic participation opportunities.” According to the school, there are more than 33,000 students currently enrolled at ISU.

In its inaugural year, the school’s Campus Climate Reporting System received 110 reports of alleged “bias,” and students credibly fear they will be anonymously reported to university authorities through the Campus Climate Response System, and refrain from speaking on political and religious topics accordingly. A Freedom of Information Act request filed by *The College Fix* reveals that political speech – including support for President Donald Trump, Rep. Steve King, and Gov. Kim Reynolds – is frequently the subject of reports, as are issues related to gender, marriage, and abortion. The CCRS 2018 Annual Report asserts that “when appropriate,

information is shared with administrative partners who may deem it necessary to investigate the situation” – laying bare the hypocrisy of the program when it claims that it does not investigate.

According to the program’s website, “The team is in constant communication and assembles quickly whenever there is an incident.” Indeed, ISU President Wendy Wintersteen noted in a recent interview with the *Iowa State Daily*, “We start every morning with a phone call so that we can hear from our campus climate response system about what has happened in the previous day. In addition, we have been meeting at least weekly to review our actions and talk about the next steps that are needed.”

Speech First has asked the court to declare that the chalking ban, email prohibition on political speech, and Campus Climate Response System are unconstitutional, and to enjoin both the chalking ban and prohibition on electronic correspondence in support of candidates and ballot initiatives in advance of the February 3 caucuses.

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