

August 2, 2017

To the Committee Members of *The Future of Voting: Accessible, Reliable, Verifiable Technology*:

We write to express concern over the appointment of Columbia University President Lee Bollinger as a co-chair of your committee. We see a potential conflict between Bollinger's efforts to dismiss a recent democratic vote by graduate employees in favor of unionization and his leading a committee focused on ensuring the integrity of free and fair elections.

As Bollinger himself stated in the University press release announcing his appointment as a co-chair of your committee: "*Nothing is more essential to a functioning democracy than the trust citizens have in casting their ballots.*" Yet, right on his own campus, Bollinger has undermined that trust by refusing to respect the validity of an overwhelmingly clear National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)-supervised unionization vote, in which 72 percent of research and teaching assistants voted in favor of unionization with a margin of nearly 1,000 votes.

After President Bollinger's administration filed objections attempting to nullify the results of the election, [an even stronger majority of RAs and TAs signed a public letter](#) urging him to drop the objections and start bargaining, dispelling any possible doubts as to the will of the majority. Since then, a growing chorus has added support for the democratic legitimacy of the overwhelming vote in December.

- 168 Columbia faculty sent an open letter urging Bollinger to start bargaining, saying the objections ["are not simply frivolous; they are insulting to the Teaching and Research Assistants who voted..."](#)
- [More than 30,000 community allies](#) added their names to the petition from student assistants urging Bollinger to drop the objections and start bargaining.
- The regional NLRB recommended [rejecting the University's objections "in their entirety,"](#) as Columbia "has failed to demonstrate that any alleged objectionable conduct occurred which could have affected the results of this election, in which the Petitioner [GWC-UAW] prevailed by more than 900 votes."
- The *Columbia Daily Spectator* Editorial Board asserted that, regardless of one's position on unionization, honoring the vote ["has become a matter of democratic principle."](#)

But Bollinger has continued to ignore these increasing calls to respect the democratic process at Columbia, and refuses to bargain with graduate workers through their union.

We understand you received a similar message recently from Columbia research and teaching assistants. As fellow policy stakeholders, representing organizations and members who are dedicated to the strengthening and protection of our democracy's voting rights, we applaud the great work of the National Academies, as well as your committee's timely and crucially important attention to the mechanisms of democratic choice. As you move forward on this project, we respectfully ask that you join us and encourage President Bollinger to stop ignoring the clear democratic mandate for the union at Columbia, to respect the election results, and to start negotiations for a contract.

Sincerely,

Wendy Fields, Executive Director, Democracy Initiative

Heather McGhee, President, Demos

Karen Scharff, Executive Director, Citizen Action of New York

Annie Leonard, Executive Director, Green Peace

Michael Brune, Executive Director, Sierra Club

Tefere Gebre, Executive Vice President, AFL-CIO

Dan Cantor, National Director, Working Families Party

Anna Galland, Executive Director, MoveOn.org

Breana Ross, President, US Student Association

Aija Nemer-Aanerud, Director, Student Action

LeeAnn Hall, Co-Director, People's Action

Emma Greenman, Director of Voting Rights and Democracy at the Center for Popular Democracy

cc: Jonathan Schiller, Chair, The Trustees of Columbia University
Jerome Davis, University Secretary (for distribution to Trustees)