



(and its symbolism) to remain on campus

Last Thursday, Jeff Stein, senior adviser to the president, sent out an email containing Elon University's Board of Trustees' statement regarding Chick-fil-A's presence on campus. The Board explained how Elon's response to the controversy was to create a 15-member Vendor Policy Study Committee. The Board studied the committee's findings and considered all stakeholders before coming to a well-thought-out decision. They assured the student body of their pledge to dig deeper into the facts, their respect for human differences and their commitment to understanding different points of view. Their final decision is that Chick-fil-A will remain on our campus.

While we applaud our administration for the creation of this committee, the extensive dialogue that was held and the new response system that has been put in place to confront incidents of discrimination, what this argument is missing is acknowledgment of the symbolic nature of Chick-fil-A on Elon's campus.

The Board listed three primary factors for its decision. The first one specified, "There is no actionable cause to remove Chick-fil-A from campus," clarifying there is no evidence of discrimination regarding Chick-fil-A services.

According to the Board, since the vendor does not actively discriminate against its employees or its customers, its removal is not warranted. This deeply discredits members of the Elon community who spent this school year professing to the committee and to Board members how the mere presence of Chick-fil-A represents hate, exclusion and humiliation. The LGBTQ community's issue was not that Chick-fil-A actively discriminated on this campus. The email from the Board made it seem as if they had accused the vendor of this. The real issue is symbolic and more pervasive. For some students, seeing people eating Chick-fil-A around campus is a constant reminder that the university has chosen political interests over the dignity of some of its students. The Board clearly ignored this fact and framed the debate in such a way that the symbolic nature of Chick-fil-A was never even addressed.

This is the civil rights issue of our time. Arguments for keeping Chick-fil-A claim Elon



AL DRAGO | Photo Editor

should not be a place that restricts freedom of speech. They argue we can't give in to the political beliefs of every person in our community. The Board's email specifies it is "reluctant to put the University in a position of monitoring or making value judgments about the lawful philanthropic giving of vendor." The letter went on to say, "Removing Chick-fil-A solely on the basis of the owners' stated views or their lawful philanthropic choices would stand in opposition to Elon's mission statement, which encourages freedom of thought and liberty of conscience."

Removing Chick-fil-A would not restrict freedom of speech and doesn't advocate giving in to the political beliefs of every person in our community. What it does advocate is a campus that will not stand for inequality.

Our Board likely wouldn't host a vendor that donated to a campaign whose aim was to eliminate women's suffrage or a vendor that allocated a part of its profits to promote Jim Crow laws that mandated segregation. So why are we OK with a vendor that has supported organizations that believe being gay is a sin and have funded conversion therapy?

These are all instances of discrimination. The only difference is our university and our country haven't yet determined this is a type of discrimination for which we will not stand. The Supreme Court is currently deliberating on two pieces of legislation that will determine the fate

of marriage equality in this country. Our country hasn't advanced enough to see that discrimination is discrimination whether it's because of the color of one's skin, the number of one's X chromosomes or one's sexuality. Discrimination should not be supported on this campus or in this country.

Where is the value in our university hosting a vendor whose presence symbolizes exclusion and discrimination for a portion of our community? Yes, everyone is welcome to their opinions, beliefs, philosophies and judgments. This is a university where we fully promote the free flow of ideas on our campus. What we should not promote are ideas that serve to discriminate against members of our community. We must draw the line somewhere and that line ought to be drawn at discrimination.

A statement from the members of the Board claims they "desire that Elon be a safe and respectful environment for every member of the community." The reality is the decision announced last week does not create this environment for the LGBTQ community and its allies. In fact, it doesn't create this environment for any of us.

If our university had chosen to remove Chick-fil-A, it would have made a statement that we are ahead of the times because we won't stand for a type of discrimination that will one day be seen as unacceptable as racial segregation or the denial of women's suffrage.

THE PENDULUM

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The Pendulum is a daily operation that includes a newspaper, website, magazine and web show. Letters to the editor are welcome and should be typed, signed and emailed to pendulum@elon.edu as Word documents. The Pendulum reserves the right to edit obscene and potentially libelous material. Lengthy letters may be trimmed to fit. All submissions become the property of The Pendulum and will not be returned. The Pendulum is located on the third floor of the Elon Town Center on Williamson Avenue.

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