

[Governor Owens in the Fold](#)

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I welcome Governor Bill Owens to DU in his capacity as a Senior Fellow in DU's Institute for Public Policy Studies, and wish him great success in that position. As emphasized by Chancellor Coombe and Governor Lamm at yesterday's press conference announcing the appointment, having two former governors with a combined 20 years of statehouse experience on campus will provide an extraordinary learning opportunity for our public policy students. I recently participated in one of Dick Lamm's seminars on cultural differences and public policy and I can attest to the quality of Dick's classroom teaching and the critical sensibilities of students in the public policy program. I trust that any seminar bringing Governors Lamm and Owens together will be an energizing, enriching experience for all involved.

I also see a win-win here to the extent that this will be an opportunity for Governor Owens to learn something about the educational challenges facing professors in the college classroom, the meaning of academic freedom, the importance of protecting academic freedom if innovative teaching and research are to be supported, the status of the university as a social good, and the nature of academic life generally. It seems to me that such understanding would be crucial should the Governor seek a return to public office, given the many challenges faced by universities and their faculties including the somewhat impoverished view that many politicians and pundits hold of who we are and what we do.

On Governor Owens' watch Colorado was ground zero for a national educational storm as detailed in the preamble to the Faculty Senate's 1993 [Statement](#) on Academic Values, Rights, and Responsibilities. The subsequent Ward Churchill affair and other forms of professor bashing spread much disinformation about what faculty members do with their time (see [here](#) and [here](#)). Calls for Churchill's resignation and/or firing for his constitutionally-protected public speech about 9/11 before anyone knew about allegations of academic misconduct—calls that emanated from the Colorado Governor's office and state legislature—inflamed an already incendiary situation and, more importantly, produced a reverberating effect on the behavior of professors in public institutions across the state that continues to be felt today (see my "AAUP in Colorado" posting).

Though he won't be serving in a faculty position Governor Owens will be getting a taste of what it's like and, perhaps, some insight into why current Republican [efforts](#) in state legislatures across the land to control the classroom behavior of professors is such a bad idea. I think there's lots that both parties can take away from this new relationship if we're all open to learning.