

Firing of UCLA researcher questioned in light of Lois Henry column

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The firing of a UCLA researcher has been called into question by a state legislator after a column by The Californian's Lois Henry highlighted the dismissal.

On Tuesday afternoon, Assemblyman Dan Logue, R-Linda, said he's sent a letter to UCLA officials "demanding an accounting for the firing" of researcher James Enstrom, who has questioned health impacts of certain air pollution in advance of stiff new trucking regulations based on other scientists' claims.

Logue's letter, which says he learned of the incident from Henry's column, was signed by 21 fellow Republicans. Bakersfield Assemblywoman Jean Fuller was among those who signed.

Logue's 3rd Assembly District includes the communities of Butte, Lassen, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sierra and Yuba.

Henry's column, published Sunday, questioned Enstrom's firing. On Tuesday, Sacramento Bee columnist Dan Walters penned a similar piece.

Henry wrote it looked to her like UCLA wanted to silence somebody whose "work on air pollution doesn't fit with popular thinking."

Popular thinking, she wrote, is that air pollution is killing people and Enstrom has tried to get the California Air Resources Board to acknowledge there still are questions about the science behind that theory.

Henry said the official reason Enstrom was not kept on was "your research is not aligned with the academic mission of the Department," according to a July 29 letter sent to him.

Enstrom's firing resulted from a secret vote of the Environmental Health Sciences Department. When Henry tried to interview the chair of the department, officials said they couldn't discuss the matter because it was a personnel issue.

Another air pollution scientist with UCLA, Beate Ritz of the Epidemiology Department, told Henry she hadn't read Enstrom's 2005 study on air pollution but she knows him "for letting his interpretations go beyond the data and his personal biases to be strong enough to not allow for a balanced and appropriately cautious interpretation of the numbers."