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In defense of Professor Harald Uhlig and free speech

We the undersigned are writing this letter to address the issue of the recent tweet by University of Chicago Professor Harald Uhlig (for more details, see Cochrane. Some have found Professor Uhlig's remarks insensitive and careless. We do not necessarily agree with his tweets but believe that such tweets do not justify the risk of professional ruin. Moreover, we have never encountered anything that he said or did that betrayed any sense of insensitivity toward other individuals or groups of individuals, whether in behavior or in what he said. On the contrary, we know him as an honest, fair, considerate person with high moral standards.

We also think that there is a fundamental issue here at stake. It is the ability to express potentially controversial opinions and offer criticism of views appearing in the public domain without facing the risk of professional and personal ruin. It is precisely this feature that differentiates liberal from totalitarian societies.

Academic excellence cannot survive in a culture in which the exchange of ideas can lead to professional impairment or compelled speech. The late University of Chicago professor, Milton Friedman, famously quipped that there is no such thing as a free lunch. Let us not enter a world in which there is no such thing as free speech.

We have allowed anonymous signatures in respect for the many colleagues who have signaled their fear of retribution.