

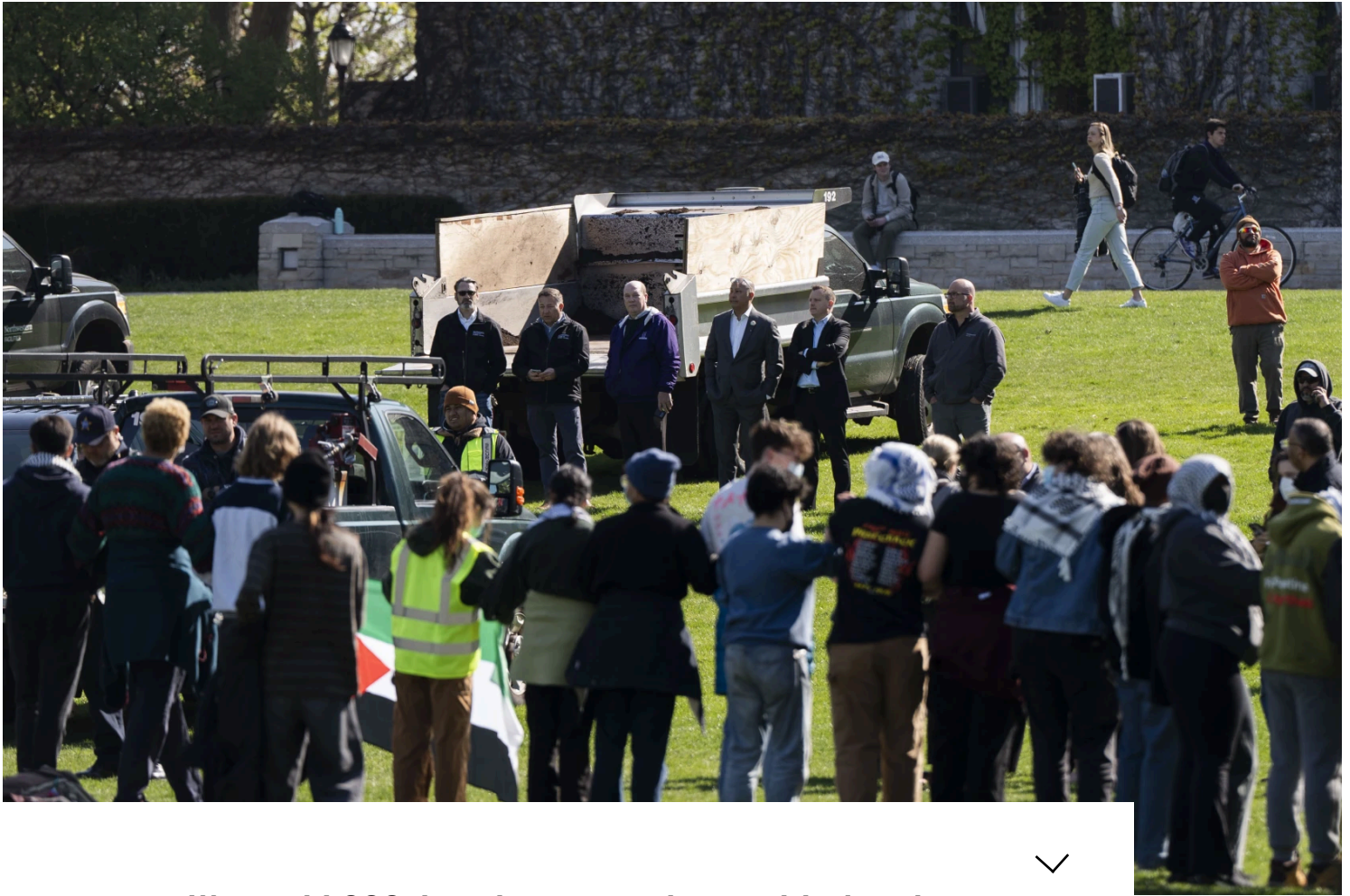


EDUCATION ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR POLITICS

# Northwestern ended its encampment without cops or violence: Why is Congress upset?

Northwestern University President Michael Schill is expected to be grilled by lawmakers next week about his decision to negotiate with students.  
By Lisa Kurian Philip | WBEZ | May 15, 2024, 11:40am EDT

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When [pro-Palestinian protesters and Northwestern administrators](#) sat down to negotiate last month over the encampment that had taken over Deering Meadow, neither side was much in the mood for compromise.

“The first day we went, we were like, ‘Oh, hell no ... we’re not moving — at all — unless you give us something really tangible,’” said Mounica Sreesai, a PhD student and member of the encampment’s negotiating team.

Northwestern’s president, Michael Schill, who’s [heading to Congress](#) to be grilled Thursday about the school’s response to the encampment there, described a similar position among administrators in an opinion piece for the Chicago Tribune.

The protesters “asked for several changes to university policy including divestment from Israel and the end of an academic program that focused on Israeli innovation,” Schill wrote. “We said a flat no to both.”

At that point, the encampment had been up on the school’s campus for less than a day, and Sreesai said the activists were not in a rush to disband it. The protest had support from hundreds of students, faculty and community members who sat in a ring around the tents on Deering Meadow, as if forming a protective barrier.

Across racial and religious differences, they mourned the [more than 34,000 Palestinians](#) killed in Gaza, while sharing meals and learning the dabke, a traditional Arabic dance. There were Muslim, Christian and Jewish prayers, and celebration of Passover.

“It took a lot of community power and strength,” Sreesai said.

But after five days of back and forth, of ceding ground and bouts of heavy rain and the threat of arrest and disciplinary action, student organizers and school officials managed to do what their counterparts at most other campuses have not: They [struck a deal](#).

Protesters would dismantle the encampment, except for one aid tent. In return, university leaders promised to answer questions from students and faculty members about Northwestern’s investments, establish an affinity space for Middle Eastern and North African students and pay to educate five Palestinian undergraduates.

The agreement has been beset by criticism from both sides. But the people who helped broker the deal believe it should serve as a model to activists and administrators at campuses across the country for how to resolve conflicts without calling in the cops.

“A lot of credit goes to the negotiating teams who were working through the night, over the weekend,” said Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, a professor at Northwestern and member of Educators for Justice in Palestine. Shakman Hurd called the agreement an “inspiration” and potential watershed moment.

It’s also a departure from other institutions, where encampments have been taken down by police, including [the University of Chicago](#), [The School of the Art Institute of Chicago](#) and, just [on Thursday](#), [DePaul University](#).

“We were ... looking at what was happening at other universities,” Northwestern’s president, Michael Schill, told WBUR’s *Here and Now*. “Even when they went in with force, it typically wasn’t successful. And so we thought the best way to sustainably de-escalate the situation was to actually talk with our students.”

That decision, and the agreement, have come under fire from multiple directions.

When Schill faces a congressional committee on Thursday, some members are expected to rake him over the coals for making a deal with students instead of bringing the hammer down.

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Three Jewish groups are calling for Schill to resign, saying he made a deal with protesters who “fanned the flames of antisemitism and wreaked havoc on the entire university community.” The American Jewish Committee accused Northwestern leaders of “succumbing







