

HEARING BEFORE THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY:

FREE SPEECH ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

TESTIMONY OF CONNOR OGRYDZIAK

UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO CLASS OF 2023

NOVEMBER 8, 2023

Summary Statement

Thank you, Chairman Jordan, Ranking Member Nadler, and members of the Committee, my name is Connor Ogrydziak, and it is an honor to bring my experiences before you today. Although I had hoped that my arrival to higher education would mark the arrival to a bastion of free speech, many of my firsthand experiences of freedom of speech violations at the University at Buffalo came during my membership of UB's chapter of Young Americans for Freedom.

Two of the most prominent examples of freedom of speech bias that I have witnessed at the university each came in the form of speaker events, hosted by my chapter. In Spring of 2022, as Vice-Chair of my chapter, I had the opportunity to assist with hosting Lt. Col. Allen West at UB, an event which was preceded by delays in the signing of our contract and a forced venue change, which was exposed by a Freedom of Information request. However, the most striking action taken against us followed Lt. Col. West's speech which included a discussion of racism in America and accounts from his decorated past. When the floor was opened to a question-and-answer session, student protestors shouted from their seats before the audio-visual employees from UB's Student Association, the Student Government, cut power to the event's microphones and speakers, ending the session. Confrontations continued upon the exit from the event, and once outside, as you just saw in a clip before the witnesses' opening testimonies, chapter members were chased by a 100-person mob across campus.

What that footage did not show was the former chapter chair being forced into a bathroom where she called 911 for rescue, and another board member being physically attacked. With silence from the university and charges not pressed by the Erie County DA's office, I have since been left to consider the precedent this sets for those who plan to protest future events on campus. Though I may not be qualified to determine what constitutes adequate evidence in the eyes of the Justice System, if those who were involved in this mob were able to resort to fear tactics and violence without consequence, what is keeping a pattern of this despicable behavior from being set and executed repeatedly?

This thought remained on my mind throughout the planning of a March 2023 event that I hosted as chairman, featuring Michael Knowles. This event would grow to gain more pushback

than any campus event in the previous four years and provide the most clear-cut examples of freedom of speech violations. This pushback included delays in contract signing from UB's Student Association that deviated far from their outlined standard course of action, condemnation of the event by a local NYS Senator and multiple Western New York based organizations, a circulated petition constructed by three University professors calling for the cancellation of the lecture, which gained thousands of student signatures, a forced venue change orchestrated not only by University administration this time, but voted on by a SUNY council, a multitude of threats and torn literature, and even a tweet from Governor Kathy Hochul on the day of the event, calling comments from Michael dehumanizing.

The outcry of this event garnered a responding statement from University President, Satish Tripathi, explaining that the Constitution protects speech on campus quote no matter how noxious the content, end quote. Based on the actions taken by faculty and the rhetoric used by Tripathi, I cannot name more clear examples of evidence that demonstrate the case of a university concerned only with following the letter of the law, rather than uplifting conservative viewpoints to a level equivalent with the values of the left, which are often celebrated in the University's own Distinguished Speaker Series. Unfortunately, this was forced to extend into a federal lawsuit, with representation by Alliance Defending Freedom, once our YAF chapter was banned from campus as the result of a new national affiliation ban by the student government.

Though I graduated in the previous Spring semester and am no longer able to engage in discourse with opposing students, I am fortunate to still have friends on campus, including current YAF board members, who can. Something that has particularly concerned me recently, both on campus, and off, is the outward support for Hamas under the guise of support for Palestinian civilians. I will not generalize entire groups, however, an unsettling number of students who appeared both in a 300-person pro-Palestine march on campus, as well as a protest against a pro-Israel speaker did not solely speak out in support of Palestinian civilians. Rather, these students directly stated their support for Hamas. I would like to be clear, regardless of background, I do not wish for civilian death. Support for Hamas is not support for Palestinian civilians, it is the opposite. Support for Hamas is support for a terrorist organization, and this must not be misconstrued.

Regardless of what side of the political aisle you reside on, it should be common ground that no student deserves to be threatened, mistreated, or silenced on campus due to their personal beliefs. Conservative students currently face a relentless uphill battle for representation on campus, and though we may seek support from outside groups and legislators such as yourselves, we will not accept the label of victims. Standing up for your beliefs will never be a waste of time, and as Americans, we hold that in our hearts. I thank you for your time.