

Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-2306

April 25, 2024

Jeff Ettinger  
University of Minnesota  
202 Morrill Hall  
100 Church Street S.E.  
Minneapolis, MN 55455

Dear Interim President Ettinger,

This week, antisemitic and pro-terror protests have escalated rapidly on college campuses across the United States, with groups, agitated by professional protestors, openly supporting Hamas and instilling fear of violence against our Jewish students. Unfortunately, we saw these protests in the heart of the University of Minnesota's campus and encouraged by elected officials, including U.S. Representative Ilhan Omar. I am extremely concerned about the ongoing protests at the University of Minnesota, and, in light of growing antisemitism on our campuses, I write to inquire into the actions the University of Minnesota is taking to cultivate a safe and successful learning environment for students of all religions.

As ensured by the First Amendment, the foundation of our country is based upon every American's right to worship and speak freely. However, every student, regardless of their ethnic or religious background, has the right to be safe on their campus. Any First Amendment activity that goes against campus policy, state law, or incites violence is subject to scrutiny and penalty. In the ongoing demonstrations across college campuses, we are seeing individuals justify their unlawful and non-compliant campus activity as an exercise of their First Amendment rights, which is not the case.

As you are aware, students at Columbia University constructed the unauthorized 'Gaza Solidarity Encampment' and have been protesting the University's financial ties to Israel, which has led to over one hundred arrests.<sup>1</sup> Antisemitism is blatantly displayed at the 'Gaza Solidarity Encampment.' Protesters have been documented chanting antisemitic and pro-terrorism speech, such as protestors yelling "Jews, Jews. Go back to Poland," "Hamas make us proud, kill another soldier now," and "Hamas, we love you. We support your rockets too."<sup>2,3,4</sup> There have been acts of

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<sup>1</sup> Perry, N. (2024, April 24). Columbia University extends talks with Gaza war protesters, averting another confrontation. Associated Press. <https://apnews.com/article/gaza-war-campus-protests-47f4f7f0916a6493b79eede3e4d0a55d>.

<sup>2</sup> Ferré-Sadurní, Luis. (2024, April 24). Some Jewish Students are Targeted as Protests Continue at Columbia. New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/21/nyregion/columbia-protests-antisemitism.html>

<sup>3</sup> Richard, L. (2024, April 22). Columbia University anti-Israel protesters: 5 dramatic moments from a week of chaos. Fox News. <https://www.foxnews.com/us/columbia-university-anti-israel-protesters-dramatic-moments-week-chaos>.

<sup>4</sup> Downey, C. (2024, April 21). Columbia Rabbi Urges Jewish Students to Go Home as Protesters Openly Cheer Hamas, Chant 'Burn Tel Aviv to the Ground'. National Review. <https://www.nationalreview.com/news/pro-palestinian-protesters-outside-columbia-urge-hamas-to-burn-tel-aviv-to-the-ground/>.

physical violence as one Jewish Columbia University student was kicked in the stomach.<sup>3</sup> These protestors have turned Columbia University into an unsafe, violent environment for their students, especially Jewish students, which prompted the University to move to hybrid learning.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, students at the University of Minnesota have taken inspiration from the protests at Columbia University and have replicated similar antisemitic activity. In the early hours of April 23, 2024, students at the University of Minnesota set up an encampment, and, like the students at Columbia, called for the University of Minnesota to disaffiliate with companies with Israeli ties, among other demands.<sup>5</sup> Antisemitism was present throughout the encampment, and my office was informed that the group was chanting, "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free," and an individual was carrying a flag of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a U.S. designated Foreign Terrorist Organization.<sup>6</sup>

The University students at the University of Minnesota and Columbia were also validated by Representative Omar, who attended the protest at the University of Minnesota and publicly praised the actions of the Columbia students who created a hostile and antisemitic campus for Jewish students at Columbia University.<sup>7</sup> Given that the students at the University of Minnesota are taking inspiration from the students at Columbia and are adhering to the words of Representative Omar, it is clear this group poses a threat to the safety of Jewish students at the University of Minnesota.

I am pleased to see that the University of Minnesota is not taking this unlawful conduct lightly. The University has stated that these protests were in violation of campus policy and state law as tents are not allowed on university property without a permit.<sup>8</sup> I am pleased to learn that the University is enforcing campus policy and state law and has arrested nine individuals who were in violation.<sup>9</sup> However, this has not deterred protestors, and the threat of escalation still exists.

As the Interim President at the University of Minnesota, you have the responsibility to provide a safe learning environment for your students. I am writing to ensure that the University is doing everything in its power to ensure the safety of Jewish students and prevent the violent escalation of protests that the country is witnessing. To gather information on the University of Minnesota's efforts to cultivate a safe and tolerant learning environment where the discussion of ideas can be freely, fervently, and respectfully debated, I kindly request that you please respond to the following questions by May 6, 2024:

1. What steps has the University of Minnesota taken to ensure the safety of their Jewish students while this unlawful, antisemitic activity has been occurring? Has the University

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<sup>5</sup> Navratil, L. (2024, April 23). Omar appears at pro-Palestinian protest at University of Minnesota; 9 arrested earlier. Star Tribune. <https://www.startribune.com/university-of-minnesota-police-arrest-9-after-pro-palestinian-encampment-set-up-on-campus/600361025/?refresh=true>.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of State. Foreign Terrorist Organizations. <https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organizations/>.

<sup>7</sup> Phillips, M. (2024, April 24). Ilhan Omar joins the pro-Palestinian college resistance with speech attacking Biden at University of Minnesota rally... days after her daughter was suspended for protesting. Daily Mail. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13341983/ilhan-omar-palestine-protest-university-minnesota-daughter.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Wurzer, C. (2024, April 23). Addressing free speech concerns amid University of Minnesota student encampment. MPR News. <https://www.mprnews.org/episode/2024/04/23/umn-free-speech-university-of-minnesota-student-encampment>.

<sup>9</sup> MPR News Staff. (2024, April 23). University of Minnesota students and faculty walk out after anti-war encampment cleared, 9 arrested. MPR News. <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2024/04/23/u-of-m-protest-authorities-clear-anti-war-encampment-university-of-minnesota>.

- provided resources, or offered to provide resources, to its Jewish students so that they may receive protection on campus? If so, please describe those efforts and offers.
2. Prior to the protests that started on April 23, 2024, did the University of Minnesota have a plan in place to protect the safety of Jewish students amid the rise of antisemitism on college campuses following the October 7, 2023, attack on Israel? If so, please submit documents that articulate that plan.
  3. Does the University of Minnesota have the tools to deescalate the protest in the event it turns violent? If so, what steps does the University of Minnesota plan to take?
  4. What disciplinary action is the University of Minnesota taking against the students who have been arrested for violating campus policy and state law?
  5. Columbia University allowed their 'Gaza Solidarity Encampment' to escalate to the point where they had to move to hybrid classes. Does the University of Minnesota envision taking drastic measures, like online learning, if things continue to escalate?

I look forward to your prompt response to learn more about the steps the University of Minnesota is taking to ensure the safety of Jewish students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tom Emmer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Tom Emmer  
Member of Congress