

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Scott (VA-03)

Full Committee Hearing

"Columbia in Crisis: Columbia University's Response to Antisemitism"

2175 RHOB

Wednesday, April 17, 2024 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you, Dr. Foxx. And thank you to our witnesses for appearing today.

I would like to start my opening remarks with a video from 2017 to remind everyone of what happened on the University of Virginia's campus during a "Unite the Right" rally. As a warning, this video may contain some graphic content.

[SHELIA WILL PLAY 1 [MINUTE VIDEO](#)]

Thank you.

As shown in the video, white supremacists marched through the grounds of the University of Virginia in 2017, chanting slogans such as, "Jews will not replace us."

At the time, I wrote a letter to my Republican colleagues asking for a hearing to discuss rising tensions and discrimination on college campuses. I have that letter with me today and I would like to ask unanimous consent to enter that letter into the record.

[PAUSE]

Regrettably, the country was denied the opportunity to address this issue seven years ago.

What we saw in the video was not an isolated event. It was the byproduct of this country's centuries-long history of white supremacy and antisemitism. And so, we should not feign surprise at hate speech on America's college campuses. The fact is that college campuses are polarized, as is our society, and we have witnessed a disturbing rise in incidents not only of antisemitism but also Islamophobia, racism, homophobia, and other forms of hate.

Nonetheless, schools have a responsibility to foster campus environments that promote understanding, respectful dialogue, and, above all else, student safety for all students.

Jewish students, in fact all students have a right to attend college free from hostility and in compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. There is no excuse for antisemitism on campus, and everyone is entitled to that safe harbor, as my colleague, the Chair referred to.

And, as Dr. Shafik [“SHA-FEEK”] notes in her testimony, “While there may be some easy cases, drawing the line between *permissible* and *impermissible* campus speech is enormously difficult. The U.S. Supreme Court has struggled for more than two centuries to define the limits of free speech under the First Amendment, and that struggle continues. Don’t expect universities to figure it out overnight.”

Now this moment requires thoughtful and nuanced discussion— something this Committee has not always done.

Moreover, we should expand the scope of our conversation to include the students who are *actually being denied* access to an education as a result of discrimination.

We should not put on political theater or seize this tragedy and its aftermath as an opportunity just to grandstand. Rather, we need to recenter this conversation around

our obligation to provide all students with a safe learning environment. In particular— as Members of Congress— we must examine the issues of antisemitism and all other forms of animus on campus. This includes respecting the need for a safe environment to learn *and* the importance of the First Amendment.

And finally, while I appreciate my colleagues' newfound concerns for *some* students' civil rights on campus, I would note that it is at odds with House Republicans' budget proposals.

You cannot have it both ways. You cannot call for action and then reduce funding for the very agency charged with protecting students' civil rights.

In conclusion, I hope this discussion today is more thoughtful and deliberative of the complex Constitutional question before us— even though this same opportunity was not afforded to Democrats when we requested it after the racist UVA rally seven years ago.

To that end, I yield back.