

TOM REED
23RD DISTRICT, NEW YORK

COMMITTEE ON
WAYS AND MEANS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SECURITY, REPUBLICAN LEADER

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH

SUBCOMMITTEE ON WORKER FAMILY SUPPORT

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

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PROBLEM SOLVERS CAUCUS, CO-CHAIR

MANUFACTURING CAUCUS, CO-CHAIR

DIABETES CAUCUS, CO-CHAIR

Dr. Kristina M Johnson
Chancellor
State University of New York
State University Plaza
353 Broadway
Albany, NY 12246

Dear Chancellor Johnson,

The importance of the free exchange of ideas is one of the bedrocks of our democracy. So integral, the right to freedom of speech was enshrined in the first amendment of the United States Constitution. A free and democratic country depends on a well-informed, educated, and opinioned public free from concerns that their speech or beliefs will be constrained or prohibited. A country where speech, especially political in nature, is infringed cannot thrive.

The exchange of these thoughts and ideas are equally important as our children become young adults on college campuses. Colleges provide them an opportunity to be exposed to new people and ideas to challenge their assumptions and beliefs. In order for this debate to happen, students must be free from burdensome restrictions and free from fear of retaliation and harm. These conditions are essential to creating a healthy environment for the free exchange of ideas to thrive.

I was deeply disturbed by the press reports concerning a visit by renowned economist Art Laffer at Binghamton University. According to press reports, as soon as Laffer approached the podium, protesters with a bullhorn jumped up on desks shouting -- with the intent to shut down Laffer's speech. This resulted in Laffer being escorted by security out of the room before having the opportunity to speak -- all because the protesters did not approve of the Young Americans Foundation which he was addressing.

It is with this in mind, I kindly request answers to the following questions:

1. Are there any SUNY-wide restrictions or limitations on the free-expression of political speech, including gatherings, meetings, tabling, and distribution of materials?
 - a. Are these requirements enforced fairly and without regard to content or group?
2. Are there any SUNY-wide restrictions on the formations of political clubs?
3. Are there any SUNY-wide restrictions on clubs inviting guest speakers?
4. What efforts are made to ensure clubs are able to function without retaliation or harm?
5. What balance does SUNY strive to make when protecting the right of a club to invite and hear from a guest speaker with the right of students to protest such speaker?

6. What disciplinary actions are enforced by the University when students take actions to stifle free speech?

Please also specifically address the incident on November 14 and 18, at the SUNY Binghamton campus.

1. Why was SUNY Binghamton unable to protect the College Republicans from distributing materials on November 14 from aggressive and violent protestors?
2. What actions have been made to discipline the aggressive and violent protestors on November 14?
3. What actions were taken to ensure the College Republicans could hear from their speaker, Art Laffer, without disruption?
4. Why were those actions not enough and what changes has the school made to ensure similar speakers aren't shouted down and forced to leave?
5. What actions has the university taken to hold protestors who shut down the event for their actions?
6. Why has the university selectively punished the College Republicans and removed their ability to reserve rooms and hold future events and speakers?

I look forward to receiving your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Tom Reed
Member of Congress

CC: President Harvey Stenger, SUNY Binghamton