

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

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### Opening Statement Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, Ranking Member

#### Joint Hearing on “Challenges to Freedom of Speech on College Campuses: Part II”

May 22, 2018

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you Chairman Palmer and Ranking Member Raskin.

Our First Amendment protections are among our most cherished rights. Free Speech is a cornerstone of this nation’s commitment to ensuring that we are able to have robust and wide-open discussion.

The Supreme Court has rightly held that practically any peaceably expressed idea cannot be suppressed by law, no matter how unpopular, repugnant, crude, or ill-informed it may be. While certain restrictions on the time, place and manner of speech can exist, any law that seeks to limit the *substance* of speech should be approached with great caution. Restrictions may exist on *how, when and where* people say things, but the government fundamentally should not restrict *what people say*.

However, free speech does not mean the right to be free from criticism. As I have a right to state my view, you have a right to disagree vocally, passionately, and peaceably.

There is a clear and present danger facing colleges and universities across the nation making peaceful disagreement difficult: an increase in white supremacist hate groups on campuses, and the targeting and harassment of students because of their religion, race and sexual identity.

This is not about culture wars or liberal versus conservative. This is about our values as a society and making our children safe to engage in civil discourse, to use their First Amendment rights, free from coercion.

Today, white supremacist and other hate groups are a significant challenge for the exercise of First Amendment rights on college campuses.

According to the Anti-Defamation League, “white supremacists are engaged in unprecedented outreach efforts on American college campuses.” They are pursuing a deliberate

strategy of recruiting college students. They are also increasing the incidents of hate speech on campuses, targeting and threatening students for their race, religion and sexual identity.

From the fall of 2016 to the fall of 2017, the Anti-Defamation League reported that there was a 258 percent increase in white supremacist propaganda efforts, such as the dissemination of racist fliers and stickers on college campuses.

Along with this rise came an increasing number of incidents of anti-Semitic, racist, and other hateful expressions that target and harass students on college campuses. The Southern Poverty Law Center reported that in the first ten days after the 2016 presidential election, there were 140 incidents of hate bias attacks on university campuses.

Coinciding with these unprecedented increases in hateful expression was a significant *decrease* in free speech suppression on college campuses. The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) reports that in 2017 there were just 35 disinvitation attempts, of which 19 were successful. This number is down from 43 in 2016. FIRE also reported that the number of universities having official “speech codes” has been dropping each year and is currently at an all time low.

As we examine the issue of free speech today on college campuses, let’s keep the focus on addressing real source of danger to the expression of freedom of speech, namely an alarming increase in white supremacist and hate group activity.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

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