



OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS

October 23, 2024

Regular Meeting

The meeting was called to order at 12:00 p.m. by President Espy in the Student Center Ballroom. Attendees were cautioned about disruption.

Secretary Miller called the roll. A quorum was present, with the following Board members in attendance:

Present: Governors Atkinson, Barnhill, Busuito, Gaffney, Kumar, Kelly (virtual), Land, and Stancato; President Espy

Also Present: Provost Clabo, Vice Presidents Gielczyk, Lindsey, Obasi, Poterala, Ripple, and Staebler, Chief of Staff Smiley, Senior Vice Provosts Baltes and Ezzeddine, Vice Provosts Cotton, Ellis, and Interim Vice Provost Padgett, Associate Vice Presidents Davenport and Hafner, Director Wallace, and Secretary Miller

Public Comment

Governor Stancato provided the following opening comments:

Public comment is an important part of every meeting of this board. The board welcomes the opportunity to hear from students, faculty, staff and all in our broader campus community. Earlier this year, we expanded the board's ability to receive and consider written and video comments, in addition to the comments provided directly in today's session. We encourage all of this input as it helps us broaden our understanding of issues of concern to us all. The purpose of this public comment session is for members of our community to share their perspectives with the board, not for interactive dialog. Please know we're listening to remarks, reading your materials and taking your perspective into consideration.

President Espy reviewed the process that will be followed, and advised that 9 individuals registered to speak by the deadline. The Board will be adhering strictly to the 3-minute time limit for statements. Of the 9 speakers, 6 individuals were present. Their statements follow below:

TOMMY AIREY

My name is Tommy Airey. I am a pastor and a writer. My wife and I moved to the Woodbridge neighborhood about three years ago, and I'm actually on campus quite a bit. Every other day I jog from home over to Planet Fitness, and so I get to cruise through campus and feel young again, and it's great to just be around students. I was a high school teacher for 18 years. One thing that continues to be really confusing for me as a member of the community is how many police cars are on campus. It is not unusual for me to see

five, six police SUVs on campus, and I'm confused by it. It's incongruent to me with how I experience students on campus, kind, warm, friendly, and this large police presence, I don't understand what the threat is. And this last spring, on one of my jogs through campus, I visited the Gaza encampment, where students pitched tents in solidarity with Palestine. Once again, I experienced them as kind, curious, friendly, incredibly disciplined, committed to nonviolence. Their demands I found to be very reasonable, that this university disinvest from companies that are profiting off of war and human rights violations. I came to find out that even some of these students have family and friends in Palestine and now Lebanon, who have been murdered by these weapons. And so I come to you again as a community member, with concern, with confusion. I don't understand why the university's investments are not aligned with institutional values, and I'm assuming that this university's values reflect what I have experienced with these students, things like spiritual depth, moral clarity, political courage. I mean, I'm inspired by these students, and quite frankly, in our culture, those three things are in a deficit, and these students are embodying these in ways that are tremendously inspiring. And so I ask you simply to stop policing students and start listening to them, because I think these are the very basic ask. To disinvest. Thank you.

LAYLA SAATCHI

I'm motivated to come to you today, because last week, as I was walking between classes, I was standing at the intersection at Anthony Wayne Drive, and a man probably about my age, walked behind me, and just loud enough for me to hear, called me a terrorist. I'm a faculty member here, and I've been here since 2001 in some capacity, and the police presence on campus is actually emboldening people to lash out to people who look like me. I am terrified walking around campus. I did not intend to cry today. I had the conviction to come and stand before you, but the terror that I feel walking around campus with the way in which officers have treated our students who look like me is what has motivated me to come to you today. Forget about the irony that it is students that look like me, who have family and friends in Palestine and Lebanon who are being murdered, who are being massacred, and their money is paying for this private security to protect, to protect people who think, and I have evidence to back this up, who think that it is okay, not only is it okay, but it is necessary to get rid of Palestinians, that it is necessary to commit terrorist acts against Lebanese civilians. My husband is a graduate of the medical school here at Wayne State. He was also the director of the residency program, the neurology residency program at Wayne State for six years. . One of his graduate students, who graduated about six years ago, reached out to him because her cousin in Lebanon had his pager had blown up, and he was undergoing reconstructive surgery, and she wanted to know whether what he did, he was experiencing, I have 10 seconds, 10 seconds isn't enough. Get rid of this police. It is having the opposite effect of what you're intending. Thank you.

JAMES PERKINSON

I propose to speak to the board on this issue neutrally, out of a refusal to be cornered in a false duality. I'm pro-Palestinian wellbeing. But saying such does not mean I'm con-Jewish wellbeing. Yes, in a more accurate statement, I'm not actually neutral regarding either side. I'm pro-Palestinian rights and possibilities and pro-Jewish rights and possibilities. I am con-violent atrocity on either side. I'm just so tired of being constantly

presented a mutually exclusive bifurcation. I've heard ad nauseam that Israel has the right to defend itself. Yes, it does, and so does Palestine. So do Palestinians. And with those two statements, we're deep into it. I'd love to have an extended debate on these questions, but limited to three minutes, I have to cut to the chase, and that chase is that from the 1917 Balfour Declaration and 1920 British mandate, forward to today, western powers have set up a profound asymmetry of rights, violent coercion and information propagation that has continually enfranchised Jewish people at the expense of Palestinian people, enabling the emergence of Israel's state and crippling any possibility of a Palestinian version of the same. Neutrality has been nowhere a part of the picture for more than 76 years. I teach as a Christian ethicist at Ecumenical Theological Seminary just down the street. I've given multiple seminars on the situation in Israel Palestine since last fall, and always lay out the history up front. 1800 years of violent Christian pogroms directed at Jewish people, culminating in the Holocaust. Nearly 1000 years of crusader violence directed at Muslim peoples, culminating in World War I. In its historical root, what's going on there today is the insidious outcome of western and Christian arrogance, militants and malfeasance across a millennium, hived off onto a little geography called Palestine, and the little ethnic group that had nothing to do with creating the trauma in the first place. And then forced to suffer the invasion and onslaught directed by western powers trying to hide from their own atrocities. The asymmetry all along the way is patent, whether in body count, land grabs, illegal settlements, arrest or being killed for daring to protest forced relocation into a Gaza strip that Israeli leaders themselves call a concentration camp controlling access to calories, to water, to air space to mobility to coastline to education to health care to future prospect for children. What do we expect people to do? Let's end the asymmetry. If we're going to arm Israel, then let's arm Palestine to the same degree so no one can do genocide on the other. That strikes you as ludicrous. Then go the other direction. Stop arming any side that way. Disinvest and let us not pretend. I don't want to play the game of the emperor's new clothes, even children see what's going on. It's called genocide by any honest assessment of dead and dying bodies. The whole world can see. I can see.

SAFIA YUSUF

Good afternoon everyone. At the last public comment I gave an impassioned speech about how you guys used me, a visibly brown Muslim woman, as a diversity token, while hurting students who look like me. Do you know what I got in response? On October 11, I got an email from Dr. Gardner saying that the university is taking steps to "address my request to stop using my image in university materials." I am convinced that you guys lack the critical thinking and comprehension that our faculty use to teach our students. While you guys did take my image down, you fully ignored my clear explanation as to why I told you all to do so. I spent three minutes telling y'all to divest, and this is all y'all got. Meanwhile, there are students begging to meet with you and explain to you why Israel's cruelty and the ongoing genocide should convince you all to not want to do anything with war profiteers and oppression. There are members of the greater campus community waiting on the BOG to address the hijabs ripped off by the police during the encampment. There are students wanting an explanation as to why you go around touting about Wayne State's so-called campus safety while raising tuition and housing costs and making students pay for what is essentially an uncomfortable police and surveillance state on campus. If anything, this is simply an admission of the university fundamentally using me

as a diversity token, while blatantly ignoring and not truly caring for what their student body as a whole has to say. Shame on you. As it stands, this genocide has been going on for 382 days. Countless, countless Gazans and now Lebanese people have now been massacred and injured by the onslaught taking place. Last week, Shagan Agdalu (sic), a young 19 year old college student in Gaza was brutally burnt to his death while hooked up to an IV at Al Aqsa hospital. There are now several public health issues taking place, from famine to widespread transmission of diseases such as polio and hepatitis A. Though you do not need a public health or medical degree to know that this is bad, what is taking place goes against the tenets promoted by my Wayne State education. B O G are you that satisfied with the return on your investments that you're willing to have the blood of innocents on your hands? Your cognitive dissonance and gas lighting is beyond maddening and sickening. Palestinians deserve to live. Lebanese people deserve to live. Wayne State students have been demanding for divestment since 2003. We will continue to do so. Free Palestine and Lebanon please.

EMMA STAMP

I am here today to strongly urge the renaming of our institution, which currently bears the name of Anthony Wayne. Wayne was not a hero. He was a perpetrator of violent atrocities responsible for the genocide and forced displacement of indigenous people. By keeping his name, we are honoring a man whose legacy is defined by destruction of entire peoples. Remaining his namesake is not a neutral act. It's an endorsement of colonial violence they carried out. To continue honoring Wayne normalizes the kind of violence it sends. It sends the message that genocide and oppression of indigenous peoples can be justified or forgotten in the name of western progress. His name stands as a reminder of the systems that dehumanize and oppress colonized people for the benefit of those in power. By keeping his name, we perpetuate the dangerous notion that the atrocities committed against the indigenous people are acceptable and appreciated, reaffirming our misguided sense of nationalism. Renaming Wayne State is about rejecting the normalization of colonial violence in all forms, both past and present. It's about standing up for values of justice and equity and ensuring that our actions as an institution align with those principles. By making this change Wayne State can lead by example, showing that we are committed to breaking from the legacy of colonialism and instead investing in the future of empowerment and solidarity. Speaking of breaking the legacy of colonialism and instead investing in the power in the future of empowerment and solidarity. Our university investment in the Michigan Israeli business accelerator, which markets itself as the only landing zone in the US dedicated to supporting the growth of Israeli companies, shows that our school is very much complicit in modern day colonialization. By supporting these initiatives, Wayne State is contributing to the continued displacement and oppression of Palestinian people, as well as counting out people and businesses right here in our city. Instead of directing resources towards projects abroad, Wayne State should be investing in communities of color right here in Detroit and we need to focus on providing education initiatives and opportunities to build generational wealth in marginalized communities that have been historically disenfranchised. These investments would help stabilize our local economy and create pathways for our own people to thrive rather than perpetuating harm elsewhere. Thank you. Free Palestine.


LEILA SALEH

Today, I want to address an issue that weighs heavily on our community, the treatment of Muslim and Arab students, particularly regarding the Palestinian student movement. Our values, your values, state diversity and inclusion, but what an absolute joke. Diversity and inclusion. Is that what you call attempting to scare your students into submission with increased police presence and stifling their freedom of speech? In recent months, we have witnessed a growing wave of activism among our students advocating for Palestinian rights. Our movement is rooted in a desire for justice and equality, values that we hold dear as an academic institution. However, the response from our administration has often been dismissive and at times harmful. Many Muslim and American or Arab students have expressed feeling unsafe, silenced or even targeted for speaking out. This is not just a matter of campus politics. It is about fundamental rights and the ability for all students to express their beliefs without fear of repercussion. It is troubling to see that while the university champions diversity and inclusion, it simultaneously fosters an environment where certain voices, especially those advocating for Palestinian rights, are met with hostility. This inconsistency undermines the very principles Wayne State stands for. We must ask ourselves, why are students who advocate the rights for Palestinians treated differently than those advocating for any other social justice issues? I urge the Board to take meaningful steps to support our Muslim and Arab students. This includes creating safe spaces for dialog, ensuring that all voices are heard, and providing educational resources to the broader campus community about the complexities of the genocide taking place in Palestine. It is essential that we foster an environment where all students can engage in discourse without fear of retribution. I urge you to speak with your students. They've been begging for meetings for months, and I urge you to divest now. Free Palestine.

RECESS

There being no further business, the meeting was recessed, to be reconvened on Thursday, October 24, 2024, at 3:45 p.m. at the Grand Rapids Public Museum, for the remainder of its business.

Respectfully submitted,



Julie H. Miller
Secretary to the Board of Governors