



News from
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DATE:

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Lavine: Blakeman's Hofstra Attack Shameful

While Nassau Executive Bruce Blakeman's demand for the resignation of Hofstra University President Susan Poser was calculated to please his MAGA base, it is at the same time just another partisan political threat to academic freedom.

Such exercises in intimidation are a characteristic of totalitarian rule. Whether in Hungary or Florida, these appeals to rightist elements are intended to frustrate the capacity of educators to pursue the liberty of intellectual thought.

In states employing this tactic, educators are made to feel fearful of preparing their students to become the critical thinkers America so desperately needs to meet tomorrow's challenges.

In Florida, teachers are prohibited from discussing and analyzing the failure of Reconstruction. In Kansas, the classic children's book "Charlotte's Web" is banned because it is considered blasphemy for fictional animals to speak.

This grotesque appeal to our worst prejudices must end.

Hofstra President Susan Poser is a nationally respected university leader. To her credit, she is not a politician. To her greater credit, she was not recruited to be a Nassau County political party hack.

President Poser's public comments on the October 7 pogrom were every bit as condemnatory of Hamas as were the statements of other noteworthy leading university administrators. Contrary to Blakeman's ideation, her statement explicitly damned Hamas.

It is beyond obvious that Blakeman's manufactured attack was intended as revenge for Hofstra's resistance to his plan to redevelop the hub.

His denial conjures up Groucho Marx's old line, "Who you gonna believe, me or your lying eyes."

There is, however, nothing funny about partisan political interference with academic freedom. Such threats are as dangerous to American democracy as are the threats to journalistic freedom, artistic freedom, voting rights and women's rights.

Entirely avoidable if not for October 7's primitive carnage, the crisis in the Middle East is far too monumental and profound a tragedy to be exploited by petty politicians for their own self-promotion.



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Hofstra is an outstanding university with a long and honored history of significant contributions to Long Island, the metropolitan region, and our state and nation. It is an integral and indispensable component of our economic and cultural life. Blakeman's attack on it and on its president is simply base and petty demagoguery and deserves to be called out as such.

We don't need politicians threatening universities to teach only the narrow views that they espouse. In 1959, then Senator John F. Kennedy said that he wanted "to make sure that these future leaders, facing the most critical, complex world and most urgent peril history has ever known, are prepared to deal with these problems . . . It is necessary, therefore, that we discuss our educational problems in the context of the demands for American leadership in world affairs, for American contributions to peace, for American assistance to the undeveloped nations of the world and for American strength in the face of harsh threats from around the world."

In the imminent shadow of danger, the crises of our modern world are every bit as perilous as they were in 1959. If we are to protect the lives of our children and grandchildren, and if our American nation is to survive, we will certainly need more Jack Kennedys.