

*Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024*

## **Remarks on Political Protests at College Campuses and an Exchange With Reporters**

*May 2, 2024*

*The President.* Good morning.

*Q.* Good morning.

*The President.* Before I head to North Carolina, I wanted to speak a few moments about what's going on on our college campuses here.

We've all seen the images. And they put to the test two fundamental American principles.

Excuse me.

*[At this point, the President cleared his throat.]*

The first is the right to free speech and for people to peacefully assemble and make their voices heard. The second is the rule of law. Both must be upheld.

We are not an authoritarian nation where we silence people or squash dissent. The American people are heard. In fact, peaceful protest is in the best tradition of how Americans respond to consequential issues. But—but—neither are we a lawless country. We are a civil society, and order must prevail.

Throughout our history, we've often faced moments like this because we are a big, diverse, free-thinking, and freedom-loving nation. In moments like this, there are always those who rush in to score political points. But this isn't a moment for politics, it's a moment for clarity.

So let me be clear. Peaceful protest in America—violent protest is not protected; peaceful protest is. It's against the law when violence occurs. Destroying property is not a peaceful protest. It's against the law.

Vandalism, trespassing, breaking windows, shutting down campuses, forcing the cancellation of classes and graduations—none of this is a peaceful protest. Threatening people, intimidating people, instilling fear in people is not peaceful protest. It's against the law.

Dissent is essential to democracy. But dissent must never lead to disorder or to denying the rights of others so students can finish the semester and their college education.

Look, it's basically a matter of fairness. It's a matter of what's right. There's the right to protest, but not the right to cause chaos. People have the right to get an education, the right to get a degree, the right to walk across the campus safely without fear of being attacked.

But let's be clear about this as well. There should be no place on any campus, no place in America for anti-Semitism or threats of violence against Jewish students. There is no place for hate speech or violence of any kind, whether it's anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, or discrimination against Arab Americans or Palestinian Americans.

It's simply wrong. There is no place for racism in America. It's all wrong. It's un-American.

I understand people have strong feelings and deep convictions. In America, we respect the right and protect the right for them to express that. But it doesn't mean anything goes. It needs to be done without violence, without destruction, without hate, and within the law.

You know, and make no mistake: As President, I will always defend free speech. And I will always be just as strong in standing up for the rule of law. That's my responsibility to you, the American people, and my obligation to the Constitution.

Thank you very much.

*Protest Activity on College Campuses*

*Q.* Mr. President, have the protests forced you to reconsider any of the policies with regard to the region?

*The President.* No.

Thank you.

*National Guard*

*Q.* Mr. President, do you think the National Guard should intervene?

*The President.* No.

*Q.* Mr. President——

*Q.* Do you agree with what the students are calling for?

*Q.* Mr. President, the former President said that he was going to——

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:07 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. A reporter referred to former President Donald J. Trump.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Political protests on college campuses; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters, White House.

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