

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF DR. GENE DAVID BLOCK  
CHANCELLOR, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES  
MAY 23, 2024 HEARING BEFORE  
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

Good morning. Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott, and members of the Committee, my name is Gene Block and I am the Chancellor at the University of California, Los Angeles. Thank you for inviting me here today.

Let me start by affirming that all forms of discrimination, including antisemitism and Islamophobia, are antithetical to UCLA's values and corrosive to our culture. We also take seriously our obligation to provide a safe and secure environment for our community. I wish I could say our campus has been immune to the disturbing rise of antisemitism that has occurred across our country since the horrific attack on Israel of October 7th. Sadly, it's not the case. What I can say, and what I look forward to addressing today, is how we have been confronting—and will continue to confront—this challenge.

Last summer, I announced my intent to retire this July after leading UCLA for 17 years. These are my final months as Chancellor of this distinguished institution. While I am saddened by the recent turmoil on our campus, I'm also proud of our legacy as a university deeply committed to the peaceful expression of differing viewpoints. It is my sincere belief that we cannot have a functioning democracy if we are unable to speak freely about the most consequential events of the day.

As a public university, UCLA is subject to a dual legal mandate: we have a legal obligation under the First Amendment to protect free speech on campus, as well as a legal obligation under federal law to protect students from discrimination and harassment.

This balance is not always easy to achieve. And it has been especially difficult since October 7th. I am fully aware that many of our Jewish students have had to confront rhetoric and images on campus that any reasonable person would find repugnant. Trust me, I understand their pain. I've lived it myself.

...As a Jewish kid growing up in the Catskills region of New York, in a family with relatives who were Holocaust victims and survivors.

...As the former provost of the University of Virginia, watching neo-Nazis riot outside the synagogue where my children were called to the Torah.

...As the chancellor of UCLA where an art show depicted me with exaggerated facial features that was reminiscent of caricatures of Jews during the Nazi era.

As we all know, being an American means sometimes being asked to tolerate offensive and even hateful speech protected by our Constitution. But there are limits. At UCLA, we draw the line when speech crosses into intimidation, threats, and harassment of others.

UCLA has a long and proud history of peaceful protest and demonstration. Before October 7th, we had successfully employed de-escalation strategies recommended by the University of California to address campus protests. But on April 25th, as conflict spread on universities across the country, a protest sprang up in the center of our campus, testing the limits of our traditional approach.

We followed University of California systemwide policy guidance that directs all ten UC campuses not to use law enforcement to remove protesters unless it is absolutely necessary to protect the physical safety of the community. Accordingly, the encampment was allowed to remain. As the encampment grew to more than 500 protesters, some of whom were not even affiliated with UCLA, it disrupted normal access to some classes, which impeded our educational mission. On April 28<sup>th</sup>, I decided to remove the encampment after violence broke out between opposing rallies and I asked for a security plan to safely do so. Two days later, we gave the protesters written notice that the encampment was an unlawful assembly and that we would remove it if the protesters did not disperse. But before the necessary police resources

could be assembled to remove the encampment, which had become a focal point of conflict, assailants attacked the encampment that evening. Tragically, it took several hours before law enforcement could quell the violence. With the support of the University of California's President Michael Drake, we provided protesters a final opportunity to leave that next day. But, when more than 200 protesters refused police orders to leave, law enforcement removed the encampment that night. With the benefit of hindsight, we should have been prepared to immediately remove the encampment if and when the safety of our community was put at risk.

We have taken decisive action in the wake of these events to maintain safety across campus. I created a new Office of Campus Safety that reports directly to me. Under this new unit, UCLA is conducting a thorough examination of our security processes. Additionally, an independent police consultant has initiated a review of the confrontation, including our planning and security protocols. Finally, we will hold accountable those who engaged in violence and violated our policies.

No student should be threatened or excluded based on their beliefs or their identity. While we always strive to meet this obligation, we must also maintain our commitment to academic freedom and free speech. This balance is central to UCLA's educational mission. It is not always easy to strike a perfect balance, but it must always be our goal.

Thank you again and I am looking forward to answering your questions.