



# ROSSMOOR NEWS

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## Republican Perspective

*By John Littig*

### Free Speech, Ivy League Style

A recent incident at Brown University gave us a lesson in free speech. Or at least enlightenment on how some of today's college students understand free speech.

New York City Police Commissioner Ray Kelly had been invited to speak at Brown. The subject of his Oct. 29 lecture was to be "Proactive Policing in America's Biggest City."

Among the audience in the lecture hall were students and "social justice advocates" who had come to protest NYPD's stop-and-frisk policy and surveillance of Muslims. The protestors did not wait for Kelly to speak. They shouted and chanted. University officials asked the protestors to allow Kelly to speak. They could raise their points at the question-and-answer session after the lecture. Of course they continued to shout and chant.

Rather than summon the campus police to remove the protestors, Brown officials cancelled the event. No one got to hear Kelly's lecture. In the aftermath, Brown University President Christina Paxson said the protest "deprived the campus...of the opportunity to hear and discuss important social issues." She went on to say "The conduct of disruptive members of the audience is indefensible and an affront both to civil democratic society and to the university's core values of dialogue and the free exchange of views."

Brown student Jenny Li, one of the organizers of the protest, said the group had petitioned the university to cancel the lecture. But when the university went ahead with the event, "we decided to cancel it for them." She called the protest and the silencing of Kelly "a powerful demonstration of free speech." Really?

The concept of free speech is that speech is allowed, not disallowed. The battle of ideas should be fought by presenting the better argument, not by silencing the other side.

Providence Public Safety Commissioner Steven Pare was interested in learning about stop-and-frisk. He attended the event and was disappointed he didn't get to hear Kelly

answer questions about the NYPD practice. “When you shut people down, whether you’re pro or con, we all lose as a community,” Pare said.

University President Paxson and Commissioner Pare have it exactly right and free speech enthusiast Li has it exactly backwards. Her group’s actions were not “a powerful demonstration of free speech,” but just the opposite.

How can an American college student have such an upside-down interpretation of the concept of free speech? Did she miss out on civics class in high school? What is she studying at Brown? Hopefully not political science or anything else involving civil society, democratic values, or the U.S. Constitution.

Of course, this incident is not unique. Conservative speakers are regularly heckled, pied, shouted down and otherwise discouraged from speaking on college campuses. But this particular incident is enlightening because Li was kind enough to share with us the twisted view she and her fellow protestors have regarding free speech.

Unless Li pays her own college expenses, someone else is investing in her education. Maybe her parents, maybe a scholarship provider. Whoever is financing her studies should ask for their money back.

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