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## Republican Perspective

*By John Littig*

“What Are They Afraid of Hearing?”

Michael Bloomberg, Harvard Business School alumnus and former mayor of New York City, delivered the commencement speech at his alma mater on May 20. His address had an unusual theme - tolerance for differing points of view.

“This spring, it has been disturbing to see a number of college commencement speakers withdraw, or have their invitations rescinded, after protests from students and... shockingly, from senior faculty and administrators who should know better.”

Bloomberg referred to the recent round of dis-invitations, withdrawals and shoutings-down of speakers deemed politically unacceptable for the ears of university students. Among these, he mentioned specifically former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice; Muslim apostate and women’s rights activist Ayaan Hirsi Ali; and former NYPD Commissioner Ray Kelly. “In each case, liberals silenced a voice...(of) individuals they deemed politically objectionable. This is an outrage.”

Bloomberg’s political pedigree is a potpourri. He has switched from Democrat to Republican to independent. A conservative with respect to foreign and economic policy, he aligns with liberals on gun control, abortion, gay marriage, global warming, the death penalty and illegal immigration. And he’s the point man for the sugar-free-food police. So he’s a mixed bag, but more liberal than conservative - by a mile.

His agenda at the Harvard commencement was not to advocate for the airing of liberal ideas or conservative ideas, but for the airing of opposing ideas. Let that sink in.

Here, he spells it out: “If you want the freedom to worship as you wish, to speak as you wish and to marry whom you wish, you must tolerate my freedom to do so, or not do so, too. What I do may offend you. You may find my actions immoral or unjust. But attempting to restrict my freedoms in ways that you would not restrict your own leads only to injustice.”

Bloomberg equated the squelching of free speech on campus to McCarthy’s “Red Scare.” He said that on today’s campuses “the forces of repression are stronger now than at any time since the 1950s.”

And he pointed to the fact that conservative voices on campus are practically non-existent: “Today, on many college campuses, it is liberals trying to repress conservative ideas, even as conservative faculty members are at risk of becoming an endangered species.” He cited data showing that in the last presidential election 96 percent of Ivy League professors supported Barack Obama - a unity of opinion he likened to the Soviet politburo.

He further said that it is not the role of a university to promote an ideology, and that requiring commencement speakers to conform undermines the very purpose of a university. And with respect to listening to contrary opinions, he asked: “What are they afraid of hearing?”

Bloomberg said, "This is an outrage and we must not let it continue. Isn't the purpose of a university to stir discussion, not silence it? It's morally and pedagogically wrong to deny other students from hearing a speech."

Bloomberg concluded: "I know this has not been a traditional commencement speech...but there is no easy time to say hard things...Stand up for the rights of others."

Well, you get the point. Bloomberg, a pretty liberal guy, expressed alarm and revulsion that American universities have regressed from bastions of free thought and expression to become monolithic institutions where dissent is disallowed.

One bright spot in all of this: Bloomberg's speech was met not with horrified gasps or derision but with enthusiastic applause from his Cambridge audience.

The repression of diversity of opinion on campus is a sort of reprise of the Dark Ages, in which learning and intellectual advancement are barely on life support. The Dark Ages lasted a thousand years. Hopefully, the renaissance of freedom of thought and expression on America's campuses will come sooner.

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