

To the UM Campus Community,

I want to share a few reflections ahead of tomorrow's event on our campus featuring Mike Adams.

I take very seriously the concerns of our community members regarding this event. We are a community committed to seeking and celebrating diversity and to supporting the growth and development of people from all backgrounds and all walks of life. Ours is a university driven by the core values of inclusiveness and equal opportunity. We stand united against divisiveness, intolerance, and hate.

At the same time, I understand the importance of allowing ideas – even those we may deem to be ill-informed, odious, and antithetical to our values – to be aired. Freedom of speech is a core value of our country and, especially, of our public institutions of higher education. It is a principle of constitutional magnitude, enshrined in our First Amendment. As a country, we have fought to protect the right of individuals to express their ideas, even when those ideas offend us. We have done so to ensure that *all* speech is permitted, even speech with which we disagree.

In practice, this means that we will sometimes encounter ideas that provoke, anger, or wound us. Protecting the right of free expression can therefore conflict with our strong commitment to foster a campus that is welcoming and inclusive. This is a challenging tension with which we grapple as a society and as a university.

The solution to this tension, however, does not lie in censorship. Once we begin to pick and choose on the basis of which speech may occur, we open the gates to having our own voices silenced – yours, mine, and all those who do not voice majority opinions.

Allowing someone to speak on our campus is *not* an endorsement of his or her views, nor do we condone speech that is hateful or targets people based on their identities. What a speaker says may define him or her, but it does not define us. It is possible for us to stand firmly in support of free speech while also standing firm in our values.

The Constitution and a long history of case law makes it clear that public universities cannot ban speakers based on content or viewpoint. But this does not leave us powerless. There are things we can do. We can work to ensure that safety and order are maintained. We can speak out strongly, clearly, and critically to challenge speech with which we disagree.

We are aware that this event may draw spectators and protestors. Campus police are working to ensure there is order, and other campus officials are working to ensure that our policies are followed. We look to our own community to express their views productively and peacefully, and I ask the entire UM community to demonstrate that, as the Supreme Court has repeatedly held, the best remedy for bad ideas is good ones.

Seth