

May 20, 2024

Via Email

University of Manitoba

Dr. Michael Benarroch, President and Vice-Chancellor

Dr. Peter Nickerson, Dean, Rady Faculty of Health Sciences

Re: Max Rady College of Medicine Convocation Speech by Valedictorian

Michael and Peter:

I write to you today because I was both hurt and appalled by the remarks the valedictorian, Gem Newman, gave at last week's Max Rady College of Medicine convocation, and I was extremely disappointed in the University's inadequate response. I have been fortunate in my life to be able to support the causes close to my heart, including the University of Manitoba. As you know, when Evelyn and I donated \$30 million to the University's Faculty of Health Sciences in 2016, that gift was in honor of my parents, and in particular, the gift to the College of Medicine was in honor of my father, Maxwell Rady. Newman's speech not only dishonored the memory of my father, but also disrespected and disparaged Jewish people as a whole, including the Jewish students who were in attendance at that convocation – some of whom I've heard from.

My father, born Avraham (Hebrew for Abraham) Radiskevich, immigrated to Manitoba from Russia in 1893. He, like so many other Jews, fled religious persecution, seeking a better life in Canada. He was lucky. Millions of others – whether during the Russian pogroms, the Holocaust, or the countless other purges of my people throughout history – were not so fortunate. Those horrors were made possible because of a set of beliefs (stereotypes and tropes) so entrenched and pervasive as to be taken as fact.

That same set of beliefs allowed the University of Manitoba to justify its decision to impose admissions quotas to keep Jews out. Despite those quotas, my father was one of the very few of his faith to be admitted to the University's medical school, which is now named in his honor.

And yet, the University allowed the Max Rady College of Medicine's valedictorian to spew these hateful lies to a captive audience, and now posts that antisemitic rhetoric on its website for all to see. And the University's only response is a lukewarm message posted elsewhere on its website about differing opinions and appropriateness of setting for expressing such "opinions."

Having seen where this kind of speech (and the excuses made for it) have led in the past, I cannot be silent. When I make a gift to an institution, I do it because I believe in that institution and I trust its governing body to do important, significant, and good work with that money. I therefore make it a point not to intervene or tell an institution what it should or should not do. But in this instance, by remaining silent, I would be complicit. So I am speaking out now because I must. Because so many like Gem Newman and the students cheering in the audience and the University itself, whose



response to what is happening on its campus has been inadequate, may not even realize all the realities of the situation. The issues are far too complex for a mere letter, and I should not have to be the one to point this out; nonetheless, apparently it bears emphasizing. It is very easy for individuals like Mr. Newman to spout slogans and quips like "settler colonialism" and "genocidal war," but if they do not take the time to understand the very long, complex, and nuanced history behind what is happening in the world today, then not only are they intellectually dishonest, but they are perpetuating the same harms that have existed for centuries. Those words are not political opinion. They are hate speech and they are lies. They espouse the same age-old prejudices about Jewish omnipotence and thirst for domination that have been used for centuries to justify the atrocities committed against this religious group, which makes up less than 0.2% of the world's population and 1.4% of Canada's.

By failing to call out Gem Newton's words for what they are, the University is no better.

Having failed to vet the valedictorian's speech in advance (despite the patent risk that something like this would likely occur, given what has happened at other universities), I beg that the University of Manitoba step up and finally do the right thing. Take down the convocation video and do not repost it unless the valedictorian's entire speech is removed. Post a revised letter from the dean, not only on UM News, but on the same page as the edited video. Condemn, in no uncertain terms, Gem Newman's remarks. Acknowledge that they were not only inaccurate, but flat-out lies, that they were hurtful to the University's Jewish students and all people of the Jewish faith, and that the remarks do not have a place in any setting at the University. Denounce antisemitism in all forms it takes, even in its latest iteration as espoused by your valedictorian.

Advocating for the protection of one group of people, while in the same breath calling for the destruction and elimination of another, is not advocacy. It is hate. It is the very opposite of the words that your graduates spoke last week when they recited the Physician's Pledge, vowing not to permit considerations of creed and ethnic origin to intervene between their duty and their patient.

Be as bold as you tell your students to be. Do the right thing: Speak out unequivocally. Take action. Do not be like all of those who came before you, acquiescing to prejudice and hatred because you do not want to ruffle feathers, or worse, because you believe it is justified.



Ernest Rady

Cc: Anne Mahon, Chancellor