

UNIT 1: THE SANHEDRIN WAY

Keep or Cancel the Controversial Speaker? You Decide!

A Mock-Sanhedrin Constructive Controversy Dilemma

Two months ago, a board member of the Orchard Institute of Jewish Studies and one of the largest single donors to Orchard asked his old friend, retired Senator Cregg McNeal, to come and speak to the Orchard student body next Tuesday about his recent book on how high-tech can bring peace to the Middle East.

Last week, a recent immigrant from a Muslim-majority country carried out a shooting attack in a school gymnasium in the former Senator's home state resulting in the loss of human life. Within the hour, McNeal tweeted "barbarians and savages!" In a television interview, he called for supporting a travel ban that would include the attacker's country of origin. In addition, he called for all Muslims in the US to fill out a questionnaire asking if they denounced a list of terror organizations and swore allegiance to the United States of America and its Constitution.

The responses came swiftly. Lawmakers across the aisle, and several civil rights organizations, as well as many Jewish organizations, harshly condemned his tweet as being racist and un-American, and referred to his suggestion of a questionnaire as a 'loyalty oath,' which they argued is unconstitutional and against the first amendment. A meme portraying former Senator McNeal with a poster of Senator Joseph McCarthy in the background reading "The New McNealizm Starts Today!" went viral, being shared by millions on social media. McNeal responded in another television interview that his tweet was only referring to terrorists and not to all Muslims. In addition, he criticized the TV interviewer for "not focusing on the real victims of this story, the people who lost their lives and their families!"

The speaking event set to take place next week within Orchard has already been advertised on Facebook. As a result, numerous Orchard alumni have written comments and sent emails asking that the talk be canceled, as it would give his statements and proposals legitimacy and a platform. They believe that it is critical that Orchard, as a Jewish organization, express a clear moral voice that rejects such religious discrimination by rescinding the invitation. Yesterday afternoon, Orchard students started a petition to boycott the talk if it is not canceled. So far, a quarter of the student body has signed the petition, and it is likely that this number will grow rapidly (even though there is a silent minority of students who privately expressed their desire, in conversations with staff and faculty members, not to cancel the talk). The board member who invited him feels very disappointed and hurt by the reaction of the student body and strongly believes that the talk should not be canceled under any circumstance, as Orchard needs to be a place where all voices are heard. There is no institutional policy or precedent for how to proceed in such situations.

MAHLOKET MATTERS: HOW TO DISAGREE CONSTRUCTIVELY



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The president of Orchard has therefore decided to gather you, representatives of the board and student body (including some who have signed the petition and some who have not, or not yet), to engage in a 'constructive controversy' exercise in order to come up with a proposal for how best to proceed in this tense and divisive situation.

Arguments in favor of keeping the controversial speaker:

Arguments in favor of canceling the controversial speaker:

Our group's proposal:

