

Rutgers Professors: We Don't Want Condoleezza Rice at Commencement

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The Rutgers University Faculty Council has approved a resolution calling upon the university's Board of Governors to rescind [its invitation to Condoleezza Rice to speak at commencement](#).

It was just last month when the board unanimously picked Rice to receive an honorary Doctor of Laws degree and serve as its principal commencement speaker for the upcoming graduation ceremonies. Rice, who was George W. Bush's second Secretary of State, will also be paid \$35,000 for her efforts.

But the faculty council's resolution has thrown a sizable wrench into the university's graduation gears, plans and festivities. It has reminded us all of Rice's distasteful war record, including her misleading of the public about the ill-advised and costly Iraq war. Recall her dire warnings against Saddam Hussein's soon-to-come "mushroom cloud" which would destroy us all?

"Condoleezza Rice ... played a prominent role in (the Bush) administration's effort to mislead the American people about the presence of weapons of mass destruction," according to the resolution. And she "at the very least condoned the Bush administration's policy of 'enhanced interrogation techniques' such as water boarding," the resolution read.

The professors were just warming up, though:

"A Commencement speaker... should embody moral authority and exemplary citizenship," it continued, and "an honorary Doctor of Laws degree should not honor someone who participated in a political effort to circumvent the law."

Ouch!

As might be expected, the professors are not alone in their opposition to Rice's presence on campus. Several petitions are circulating among students as well.

"I'm a member of the faculty council and this seemed the right forum to raise the concern," said Robert Boikess, a Chemistry professor who actually introduced the resolution. "Many students are very concerned as well."

Rudolph Bell is a professor of history, and was willing to cut Rice at least a little slack: Rice would be welcome to speak on campus at any event other than graduation, because "...the person invited for the graduation, which is supposed to inspire graduating seniors, that is a different kind of setting," he said. "Academic freedom doesn't guarantee the right to be a

speaker or receive an honorary degree.”

A spokeswoman for Rice declined to comment.

French professor Francois pointed to the “political” nature of this pick. “It seemed to me that this was a heavily political decision that had little to do with interest of our graduating students,” he said. “She was intimately involved in a campaign that was a manipulation. Whether she was aware of it or not. Our students are being manipulated to deliver a political point.”

At this writing, the university is not backing down. Rutgers spokesman Greg Trevor said that Board of Governors selection of Rice was “unanimously approved” on Feb. 4, and that:

“Dr. Rice is a highly accomplished and respected diplomat, scholar and author, and we are excited that she has agreed to address our graduates and guests at Commencement,” Trevor said.

Rutgers’ student newspaper published a letter from Lawrence Michael Ladutke, an alumnus, who was critical of the school’s choice as well: “Honoring such a dishonorable person is disgusting because doing so honors the inhumane and unconstitutional actions Rice carried out,” Ladutke wrote. “My face is red, and not with scarlet pride. Rather it is red from embarrassment and anger.”

Rice is no stranger to this kind of controversy, however. Back in 2006, while still in office, she gave the commencement address at Boston College. A large number of students and faculty stood and turned their backs to her throughout her address.

And as recently as 2012, she gave the commencement address at Southern Methodist University, home to the George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum. No back-turning occurred at that event, however.

Opinion

One of then-Sen. Barack Obama’s first votes in the Senate was in favor of the confirmation of Rice as secretary of state. I knew then that Obama was not all he was cracked up to be.

Recall that he campaigned vigorously for the Senate (and later for the presidency) as a staunch opponent of “Bush’s war.”

Folks in Chicago were left scratching our heads wondering how could he possibly vote to confirm Bush’s national security adviser as secretary of state?

Turns out that that was one of his *less* controversial betrayals of everything he ran and stood for.

My unsolicited advice, then, to the students and faculty of Rutgers is this: Yes, Rice is “free” to speak in the name of both “free speech” and “academic freedom.” But do not simply follow Boston College’s example by turning your backs on Rice. Actually get up and march out of the ceremony *en masse* if she dares to show her face.

There are rumored to be arrest warrants waiting for her, Bush, Rumsfeld, Cheney – the whole damn crew – should they ever venture beyond the borders of the US.

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