



James A. Himes
Congress of the United States
4th District Connecticut

President Alan Garber
Office of the President
Harvard University
Massachusetts Hall
Cambridge, MA 02138

August 18, 2025

Dear President Garber,

Thank you for speaking with me Friday about Harvard's discussions with the Trump administration. Having been stuck in the House chamber on January 6, 2021 when President Trump urged a violent mob to disrupt the constitutional transfer of power, I understand how terrifying the assault by an authoritarian and lawless administration can be.

In our conversation, you asked me what I thought the consequences might be to Harvard and to the Trump administration should Harvard refuse to acquiesce to this administration's demands. Since Friday, I have reflected on your question.

Were Harvard to refuse further "negotiations," President Trump and his enablers will continue with their malignant and corrupt assaults. Trump feels in his gut that if Harvard can be brought to heel, anyone can. Imagine the sense of impunity the President will feel if it is. Conversely, authoritarians well understand the existential consequences of demonstrated failure to bring anyone—independent associations, opposition groups, civil society—to heel. Once a bully's power is shown to be limited anywhere, it is questioned everywhere.

To be sure, Harvard alone has little ability to blunt President Trump's attacks on freedom and democracy. It will take courageous leaders, institutions and individuals in their millions to do so. But Harvard's clear refusal to bend the knee would profoundly hearten those who are standing against the ideological muggings. Other universities, law firms, and corporations subject to this administration's extortion will see principled leadership and a kindred institutional spirit. People everywhere without a scintilla of the security Harvard enjoys will be validated, energized, even catalyzed.

The extent of the havoc Donald Trump might visit on Harvard is something I am less qualified than you to judge. But I ask you to consider two things. As a practical matter, recent "settlements" by other universities, corporations and law firms demonstrate that no amount of



“good works” or benign commitments lift the stench of capitulation and its attendant reputational damage. Similarly, experience shows that acquiescence to this administration is no final “settlement.” Bullies know that capitulation is the first, not the last step to achieving their ends.

More importantly, as a matter of principle, acquiescence is the wrong and dishonorable path. Should the administration do its worst, there will undoubtedly be damage to critical research, uncertainty for staff and students and the pervasive fear upon which authoritarians rely. But Harvard will not stand alone. The courts are consistently turning back the administration’s lawless behavior, including its abrogation of Congress’ power of the purse. The vast majority of alumni, driven now by principle rather than nostalgia, will stand strong with Harvard. While the judiciary and grateful alumni cannot fully blunt the pain that this administration could inflict, the fight against authoritarianism is never without sacrifice.

I think of the legions of public servants who have invited financial ruin by speaking out or resigning. I think of my Republican colleagues who sacrificed their political careers rather than rationalize the direction their once great party has turned. This commitment to principle is at the center of Harvard’s relationship with the considerably younger country in which it resides. Harvard was already 140 years old when seven graduates joined 49 others of wealth, power and standing to confront a dangerous tyrant and found a nation. They had everything to lose, but to the hope for freedom they explicitly pledged their lives, fortunes and sacred honor.

Now Harvard University must do the same.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Himes", with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

JIM HIMES
Member of Congress