

U-M student government votes against divestment resolution after much debate



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A controversial [divestment resolution](#) that sparked a campus-wide debate failed to win support from the University of Michigan's Central Student Government.

After more than five hours of discussion, CSG voted 25-9 early Wednesday morning to reject the resolution put forth by Students Allied for Freedom and Equality.

SAFE wanted CSG's help in calling on U-M to divest from companies that allegedly have supported human rights violations against Palestinians.

Several CSG representatives said they thought it wasn't the student government's place to take such a stance. Some thought it was too divisive of an issue for them to pick sides, given the political context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the lack of consensus on the issue among the campus community.

SAFE's resolution made specific reference to "the Israeli occupation's policies and systematic discrimination against Palestinians."

CSG representative Jacob Ruby called it a one-sided attack on Israel disguised as a human rights resolution.

"Not only is this resolution regarding an issue that is only peripherally related to campus life, the issue is incredibly divisive and greatly contributes to animosity between groups on this campus," he said.

About 400 students and other members of the community packed into the Rogel Ballroom on the second floor of the Michigan Union for the meeting, while hundreds of others were turned away when the room reached capacity.

Some moved to an overflow space in a nearby room, while more than 1,700 at any given time were watching an online live stream.

Members of SAFE, who staged a sit-in protest inside the CSG Chambers this past week to have their voices heard, said they felt silenced when CSG decided last week to indefinitely postpone action on the divestment resolution.

CSG reconsidered that move Tuesday night and allowed more than three hours of public commentary from people on both sides of the issue, including Jewish students who saw the resolution as an attack on Israel, and Palestinian students who argued real human rights violations are occurring and the university needs to take a hard look at its investments.

The resolution would have called on the U-M Board of Regents to appoint an ad-hoc committee to investigate the ethical and moral implications of the university's investments in four specific corporations — Caterpillar, General Electric, Heidelberg Cement and United Technologies — along with any other companies that allegedly profit from and facilitate "the Israeli occupation and

siege of Palestinian land."

The resolution would have asked U-M to divest within one year from companies that refuse to cease unethical business activities.

Following an emotional public comment period, CSG representatives deliberated for more than two hours before they moved to a vote shortly after 1:30 a.m.

They voted by secret ballot so representatives wouldn't be targeted or attacked for how they voted, though some made their stances very clear.

CSG representative Andrew Modell said the resolution made a statement about Israel that he wasn't willing to support. He also questioned divesting from General Electric, saying the U-M Hospital uses General Electric equipment to save lives.

CSG President Michael Proppe said he wasn't convinced there was broad consensus across the campus community for the resolution. He said it seemed like more of a 50-50 split given the debate and discussion Tuesday night.

Sam Molnar was one of a handful of CSG representatives in favor of the divestment resolution. He said the future of the entire world depends on building a nonviolent movement to end human rights violations.

"I support #UMDivest out of a love for my four little cousins who live in an illegal settlement in the West Bank," he said. "Another round of violent confrontations between Israeli and Palestinian people utterly terrifies me."

Nicholas Rinehart was another CSG representative who came out in support of the resolution, saying he made a mistake when he voted to postpone it last week.

"We have the ability and the obligation to speak up against our university's irresponsible investments," he said.

SAFE co-chairwoman Suha Najjar, a Palestinian student, told CSG representatives that she pitied them for how they've handled the situation.

"Some people are angry at you, and some people think you are cowards, and some have even lost respect for you," she said. "But me, I pity you. I pity you because you had the opportunity to stand on the right side of history."

She spoke generally of threats and intimidation she said members of her group have faced because of their stance on the issue.

CSG Vice President Bobby Dishell, a Jewish student who said he is pro-Israel but not anti-Palestine, said it's unfortunate that students on both sides of the issue have faced intimidation and threats, such that some are fearful to go to class.

"The issue presently at hand has proven to only divide campus into a hostile environment," he concluded.

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