

APRIL SPECIAL MEETING, 2021

*The University of Michigan
Virtual
April 2, 2021*

The regents met at 9:30 a.m. via a livestream link on the university gateway. Participating were Regents Acker, Behm, Bernstein, Brown, Hubbard, Ilitch and Regent Weiser. Regent White was away on active duty assignment for the National Guard. Also on the call were Vice President Baird, Vice President Churchill, Provost Collins, Vice President Cunningham, Chancellor Dutta, Chancellor Grasso, Executive Vice President Hegarty, Vice President Kolb, Vice President Lynch, Vice President Michels, Vice President Pendse and Executive Vice President Runge. Vice President Harmon was absent.

Call to Order and President's Opening Remarks

President Schlissel called the meeting to order. He called the roll of all the regents for the record and for those not able to see the screen. President Schlissel announced that the Board of Regents called this special session and he turned it over to Regent Ilitch.

Regent Ilitch thanked everyone and said, "As is the case with all of our board meetings, this meeting will be posted on the university website by tomorrow morning.

"The board and the president have received considerable input and commentary from members of the university community and the public about the recently recorded statements of our colleague Ron Weiser. We have received voice messages and phone calls. We have heard those of you who have taken the time to reach out. We also have read the statements issued by President Schlissel and the deans last weekend and we have read the statement circulating amongst our faculty, which has received hundreds of signatures as of this morning. We have

listened to students and have spoken with CSG President Nithya Arun and Vice President Carla Voigt, who represent the students at the university. And we have read the statement from University of Michigan Regent Emeriti. I want to acknowledge this. The board acknowledges this. We have heard your views and we take them very seriously.

“It is important for everyone to understand what the individual regents can and cannot do, individually and as a body, when people demand that a regent resign from their position as a regent. We have no authority to remove a duly elected member of our board or any higher offices. There are processes for recall, impeachment and gubernatorial removal of an elected office, spelled out in Michigan’s state law. But we do have powers as regents of this constitutional body and we are here to exercise those powers.

“With that said, I would like to introduce a resolution.”

Regents’ Resolution

WHEREAS, The Board of Regents of the University of Michigan, having been empowered by Article 8, Section 5 of the Constitution of the State of Michigan of 1963 with the honor and privilege of providing “General Supervision” of the Institution of the University of Michigan;

WHEREAS, The Board of Regents have served as a model for bipartisanship and comity, even when we disagree on particular policies, with Regents serving the University of Michigan and its mission of educating the next generation of leaders in Michigan and throughout the Nation;

WHEREAS, The Board of Regents recognizes that Regent Ronald Weiser acknowledges the mission of the University of Michigan; and has given generously of his time and finances to continue that mission;

WHEREAS, The Board of Regents has maintained strong relationships with our Constitutional Officers, Members of Congress, and the Michigan legislature in order to ensure our continued ability to meet the University’s Important Mission of Education in our State;

WHEREAS, Regent Ronald Weiser’s language, referencing our constitutional officers as “witches” to be “burned at the stake” brought national and international disrepute on the University of Michigan, and his reference to the word “assassination” regarding Members of Congress is damaging to the University and its relationship with Members of Congress and our Constitutional Officers

WHEREAS, the use of such language endangers the lives of our Constitutional Officers and Members of Congress, and that its use creates a climate of hostility on our campus through the use of violent, sexist language, and damages the institution of the University of Michigan;

WHEREAS, while the Board of Regents recognizes that it has no legal authority to remove Regent Weiser, The Board believes that Regent Weiser should resign his constitutional office as Regent of the University of Michigan;

THEREFORE, the members of the Board of Regents condemn in the strongest possible language the behavior of Regent Weiser, his language, and the actions taken therein, and calls on Regent Weiser to resign from the Board of Regents forthwith.

President Schlissel called for a motion. Regent Bernstein motioned, seconded by Regent Acker. Discussion followed.

Statement from Regent Weiser

Regent Weiser said, “As a university regent, I take full responsibility for what I said, and I am sorry and regret my poorly chosen words that were offhand remarks made at a private Republican Party meeting. I agree with part of this resolution, but I will not resign. I pledge to be part of a respectful dialogue going forward and challenge my colleagues and others to do the same. I will not be canceled.”

Statement from Regent Acker

Regent Acker said, “President Schlissel, Chair Ilitch, members of the Board of Regents, citizens of Michigan, thank you for granting me a few minutes to speak today.

“When it’s all said and done, the University of Michigan, in all of its glory, comes down to one defining central mission: we are here to give our students the tools to be the leaders of tomorrow. Leaders. We say it in our fight song because leadership is part of our identity. The University of Michigan stands to help nurture these leaders of our future to be their very best. To do that, to serve this community, demands wisdom from us. It demands that we divorce ourselves from the dangerous partisanship tearing our country apart at the seams. If any of us leading this university fan the flames of hate and division, that is a betrayal of our work and everything the University of Michigan stands for. Tragically, one of us has fanned those flames

and betrayed this community. We must confront that dereliction with the urgency of this moment.

“On October 8, 2020, 13 men were arrested in a plot to kidnap and execute the Governor of this state, Gretchen Whitmer. Last week, as we began our public meeting, three men were beginning a preliminary hearing in Jackson County. That hearing was empanelled to determine whether the men would be bound over for trial for attempting to kidnap and murder our governor. We found out later that at that moment Regent Weiser was en route to address the North Oakland Republican Party. By itself, Ronald Weiser missing the meeting was not momentous. But his remarks that night in North Oakland are devastating.

“Speaking to a partisan crowd that night, Regent Weiser engaged in dangerous rhetoric. Participants spoke harshly of our own distinguished alum, Congressman Fred Upton. They attacked Congressman Peter Meijer, who bravely served our nation in Iraq. Congressman Meijer’s father Hank, as many of you know, received an honorary degree from the University of Michigan in December 2019, introduced by Regent Ron Weiser. But what Regent Weiser said that night was much different. In his remarks, Regent Weiser referred to Governor Whitmer, Attorney General Nessel and Secretary of State Benson as “witches.” Regent Weiser invoked the prospect of “burn[ing them] at the stake.” Responding to a shouted remark bashing our state’s elected congressmen, Regent Weiser responded by referencing assassination.

“A leader of the University of Michigan joked about assassination. It would be easy to chalk this up to a misstatement. But Regent Weiser’s remarks that night were no accident. These remarks were politically motivated and poll-tested. That these things happened after the events of January 6, 2021, and the attacks on our governor make his language all the more

appalling. Regent Weiser's words contrast with the courage of the late Senator John McCain. When confronted by an irate voter calling his opponent a terrorist, Senator McCain could have indulged her, he could have fed the wellsprings of hate. Instead, he pushed back. That day McCain said, 'No ma'am. He is a good man and a good citizen that I just happen to have disagreements with.'

"Regent Weiser's words contrast with the courage of two of the men who were under attack as he spoke. Representatives Upton and Meijer were two of the 10 brave souls in their party who voted to impeach the former President for inciting the Capitol riot. For their courage, the crowd Regent Weiser addressed, called them witches.

"Regent Weiser had a choice that night. He could have been the leader we ask our own students to become. He could have stood against cruelty and violence and lies and set an example that our students could follow into their lives when they confront the forces of division. Instead, he indulged that hate. He fed it as an arsonist feeds a small flame. Instead of being a leader, he did not just follow but coaxed the crowd into a dark place. Instead of patriotism, Regent Weiser chose cowardice. His words irreparably harmed his reputation at this institution. I don't say any of this with satisfaction but with profound sadness.

"Regent Weiser has given deeply of his time, his energy, and his resources to this university. None of us deserves to be damned only for our worst moment or one lapse in judgement. But when given the chance to say sorry, Regent Weiser refused for two days before offering a vague, limp apology. Since then, he has accused others of lying. He has claimed that the outrage at his remarks, as he did today, is some insidious attempt to "cancel" him.

Accountability is not cancellation and the reason we are here today is because Regent Ron Weiser refuses to be accountable for his actions.

“Regent Weiser, you should be sorry for your behavior. What you said contributed to the culture of violence. The wounds of the plot against the governor are still fresh. Your words could have killed someone. You should be sorry because you, as a leader, must know the power of words, know that what we say can give permission to others to act on our words, to commit violence from them. I believe in forgiveness for you and anyone else. But there is no room on this board for those who advocate violence. Make no mistake: that is precisely what you did. You have forced this board to take this painful and permanent step, to condemn one of our own.

“I hope that you will take the steps to fix the damage you've caused to our community, to our campuses, to our board and to our institution. But that requires real contrition and acknowledgment of what you did wrong, and then listening to those who you've wronged. It is impossible for you to do so while remaining on this board. You have lost all credibility and moral leadership.

“I hope that next time you can show the courage of John McCain, of Fred Upton and of Peter Meijer. And I hope you seek repentance and forgiveness for your behavior.”

Statement from Regent Behm

Regent Behm said, “Regent Weiser, after you called our state’s governor, attorney general and secretary of state ‘witches’, worst yet, you stated the GOP needs to make sure ‘they’re ready for the burning at the stake.’ Regarding Republican Representatives Upton and Meijer, because your constituents felt as though the congressmen were not loyal enough to our last president and

should be removed, you replied, ‘other than assassination, I have no other way other than voting them out.’

“Not only are these statements dangerous, abhorrent and incite violent behavior, they serve to suppress Michigan’s citizens from exercising their right to vote and are a form of voter intimidation. Instead of intimidating people not to vote, come up with ideas that folks can support and vote for. Rather than saying what you said in these two instances, you should have followed Senator McCain or President Bush’s examples, and instead of inciting violence and attempting to intimidate people, you should have corrected people’s false beliefs.

“It is in this instance where I believe that if you insist on serving as a regent and chair of the Michigan Republican Party you have an irreconcilable conflict of interest. I would like to remain apolitical at this time, but you have injected politics into this discussion. Instead of coming up with ideas as to why Michigan citizens should vote for your party’s candidates, your party is focused on taking away their right and their ability to vote.

“Here at the University of Michigan, you have endowed the Weiser Center for Emerging Democracies. Thank you for doing so. But on its website it says it promotes scholarship to better understand the broad historical, political, economic and social conditions under which democracies emerge and autocracies endure.

“With this in mind and with absolutely no proof of any voter fraud in Michigan, be it under Republican or Democrat control, members of your party, last week, filed 39 bills that serve to suppress and silence voters. This is how autocracies and authoritarian regimes take hold and freedoms of citizens to express themselves are eroded and eventually disappear.

“In the height of irony, while you, through your words and your party’s actions, act to exclude Michigan citizens from the democratic process, the Weiser Center for Emerging Democracies is convening an emergency roundtable discussion next Tuesday from 12:00 to 1:30 p.m. Its title is ‘Submerging Democracy in America’s States.’

“Please come to terms with your actions as chair of a political party, realize they are incompatible with your fiduciary duty to the University of Michigan, and look for ways to increase the exchange of ideas in our great state, act not to suppress votes but convince more Michiganders to engage in our democratic process.”

Statement from Regent Bernstein

Regent Bernstein said, “Regent Weiser, I appreciate your apology but your apology does not release my responsibility to hold you accountable nor does it minimize the importance of strongly affirming our university’s values. The only thing worse than convening this meeting to censure Regent Weiser and call for his resignation would be to not censure him and not call for his resignation. But this special meeting is as unprecedented in our 200-year history as it is unavoidable. It would be easy to dismiss Regent Weiser’s remarks as just partisan politics as usual or a mere slip of the tongue. But this conduct cannot become politics as usual. Violent threatening rhetoric should have no place in even the most partisan circumstances.

“While Regent Weiser’s conduct was in the political arena, the harm it causes goes far beyond politics to include this university. This type of speech damages the very fabric of our democracy and therefore our university. Permitting violent misogynistic rhetoric only enables more violent misogynistic rhetoric. We cannot permit this type of destructive speech to become normalized by our silence. We have seen how hateful, reckless, repugnant views can move,

slowly, incrementally from the margins towards the middle of our society. We tolerate this dynamic at our own peril.

“Today, I am saying, my colleagues are saying, and this university is saying enough is enough. The conduct that we publicly and forcefully condemn and that we censure today has real consequences. We simply cannot ignore this conduct. Not if we are a university that takes its mission seriously. Not if we respect all of our students - especially women - on our campuses. Not if we value our faculty who address the most complex, consequential and frequently controversial challenges of our time with respect for and decency towards their colleagues.

“We cannot tolerate this dangerous vitriol. Not in a state where the FBI thwarted a plot to kidnap and murder our governor - one of three women who Regent Weiser called ‘a witch’ - who along with our attorney general and secretary of state - he said should be ‘burned at the stake.’ No. No more. Not here. Not now. Not ever.

“As a university, it is our job to elevate our understanding of ourselves and our world. What light can we shine on this moment? Indeed, since 1895 a lamp of knowledge has appeared on the seal of our university. So, what can we teach our state and society right now? I believe we must teach two important lessons:

1. That words matter – even in our deeply divided nation, we must address our differences in ways and with words that create more light than heat.
2. That power matters – as regents, while we must respect each other’s freedom of speech and acknowledge the higher protection that political speech must have, we must at the same time recognize the higher responsibility we have as leaders for our own speech.

“In the end, this is a moment of accountability and affirmation. Today, we hold ourselves

accountable for our words. And reckon with our responsibilities as leaders. In doing so we affirm the values of our beloved university.”

Statement from Regent Brown

Regent Brown said, “I want to thank Regent Weiser for his eventual apologies, including his words today, and I hope he becomes a frequent, vocal leader for civility in our society, especially in the political area. But although I believe in redemption and forgiveness, they are not mutually exclusive from consequences.

“The comments by Regent Weiser were misogynistic, divisive and reckless. I was sickened to see the Republican State Party Chair refer to our state's three highest elected officials, and my friends, as "witches" to be "burned at the stake," and for the audience to cheer in support.

“These statements are at odds with everything this great university, our state, our country and good people hold sacred. Degrading and inflammatory speech by any public official is inexcusable and should not be tolerated by good people. It saddens me to say these things about a colleague. Although we hold very different political beliefs, I've known Regent Weiser to be an exceptional regent, completely dedicated to the university and its noble mission.

“I know Regent Weiser loves the University of Michigan. He has been extremely generous to the university's three campuses and hospital. His gifts have transformed the lives of hundreds, if not thousands, of our students and patients of all genders. It is not an exaggeration to say his gifts to Michigan Medicine have saved lives and will save countless more in the future.

“I do believe in redemption and try to practice forgiveness. I am troubled by the inclination to condemn an individual for an unfortunate slip of the tongue or word choice, and I believe we should not judge a person by his worst day or define him by his worst moment.

“So, particularly at this moment in our history when such extreme rhetoric from too many political leaders has sewn deep division in society, hurt individuals and threatened our democracy, I can only come to the conclusion that any official, including Regent Weiser, who would unrepentantly engage in such speech should not remain in public office, especially at an institution like the University of Michigan, which so values upholding gender equality and protection of women's rights.”

Statement from Regent Hubbard

Regent Hubbard said, “Let me be clear, I do not agree with the language used by Regent Weiser in reference to any public official. As a newly elected public official, I expect respect and professionalism when others contact and reference me in my role as regent. Other public officials should expect the same treatment. I look forward to getting back to addressing the important issues facing the university such as the need to constantly strive for academic excellence and focusing on student needs.”

Statement from Regent Ilitch

Regent Ilitch said, “As chair of this board, a situation like this is something I never wanted to see, certainly not on my watch. But the situation warranted a meeting like this, as well as the public discussion that surrounds it. Our board is limited by law on how we can address the situation. Regents are elected by the voters of Michigan. As elected officials ourselves we have the right and, I believe, the obligation to gather in this way and publicly share our views.

“While regents affiliate with political parties, we have not been and must not be a governing body that falls prey to destructive politics. We have found consensus and enacted policy designed to lead in the best interests of this university. We aspire to provide the governance that will allow this institution to continue to fulfill its mission in extraordinarily positive ways.

“Today, we are faced with a challenge. We have encountered challenges before and have overcome them. This challenge is caused by a member of our board who simply is unable to manage a conflict in his public life. He, as of yet, has not corrected the conflict. Each of us as regents knows that when we were elected to these positions, our fiduciary responsibility is to the University of Michigan. But it’s more than that. We must always represent and serve the university as long as we are in office. We can’t just turn it on and off. It’s always on.”

“It has become clear that serving as chair of a statewide political party is simply not compatible with serving on this board. And, the situation is only likely to intensify as we get closer to the 2022 elections and the state party chair becomes more and more of a public focal point.

“We also know that violent words and violent threats lead to violent actions. When everyone in this state found out that the governor was the target of a kidnapping and murder plot, that should have changed everything. Sadly, it hasn’t.

“As our CSG president and vice president stated so well ‘There is no place for sentiments that invite and normalize violence against women in a world where over one in three women experience physical violence in their lives. In engaging in said comments and actions, Regent Weiser has demonstrated that he cannot faithfully serve the student body.’

“Hiring a security detail should not be in the job description for public service. But now, sadly, it is. That’s because of a violent rhetoric and it has to stop. I’ve taken a look at the people who were attacked and impacted by this. They are not just office holders. They are people with families. The statewide elected officials and members of Congress who were the targets of the violent language are mostly connected to this university. They are our alumni, our donors, and parents of our students. Just as an example, Attorney General Nessel graduated from UM with a BGS degree in 1990 and Congressman Upton graduated from UM in 1975 with a BA degree. And just stop and think. Take their names and put your name there. Think about what that feels like and how it impacts or could impact your families.

“Here at the UM, we should not only condemn these words, but we actually teach our students the lifetime value of avoiding them. Please listen to these titles. These are actual names of classes that are taught at this university that equip students to live a life of respecting others: Values & Ethics in Public Policy; Diplomacy and Statecraft; Apology, Reconciliation & Reparations; Facilitating Dialogue Across Fault Lines; Race, Identity & Socio-Cultural Difference; Public Management: Leading Across Difference; and Language and Discrimination.

“This is who we are and what we aspire to be. If Ron Weiser truly loves this university, he will put the university first. He will adhere to its values and its teachings and step aside and resign. I will say again what I said last week - his use of violent imagery crossed a line that is inconsistent with what should be our shared values. There should be no place for physical threats by elected or political leaders on our board or in our state. These threats and then his unwillingness to apologize fully and sincerely put the university in an untenable position. And lastly, as the regent emeriti most recently wrote, ‘To be clear, Mr. Weiser’s remarks were not

‘taken out of context.’ They are apparently what he believes, and issuing an apology to ‘those I offended’ is a tired cliché, which is customarily thrown out when a person isn’t apologetic at all.’

President Schlissel called for a roll call vote with Regents Acker, Behm, Bernstein, Brown and Ilitch in support, Regents Hubbard and Weiser abstaining and Regent White absent. The motion carried.

Regent Ilitch said, “Section 1.06 and 1.07 of the bylaws state the rules which govern the Board of Regents’ committees. In my capacity as chair of the board I have authority to appoint members of the board to committees. Therefore, effective today, I’m reassigning the committee membership as follows:

- FAI Committee Chair Regent Bernstein
- PCG Committee Chair Regent Brown and Regents White and Ilitch
- Committee on Dearborn and Flint Chair Regent Behm and Regents Acker, Bernstein, Brown and Ilitch
- HAC Committee Chair Regent Brown and Regent Hubbard

“Regent Weiser will no longer be a member of the FAI committee or the Committee on Dearborn and Flint.”

Regent Ilitch provided final remarks saying, “I would like to thank my colleagues for their time. I would like to thank the executive team for their time in this situation. I would like to give a special thanks to Board Vice Chair Regent Acker and Vice President Churchill for the extraordinary time spent on this. This time that we have all spent has stolen away the time that we usually spend for the welfare of our students, academic excellence and the general business of the university. Our next meeting is in May. See you then and all be safe.”

The meeting was adjourned at 10:08 a.m.