

Attorney Eric Lee exposes witch-hunt of Yale scholar and defends pro-Palestinian speech rights on The Hill's "Rising"

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On Friday, immigration attorney Eric Lee appeared on The Hill's streaming news program "Rising" and delivered a defense of free speech and due process rights that are involved in the suspension by Yale University of international law scholar Dr. Helyeh Doutaghi on March 11.

Dr. Doutaghi, 30, who held a position as Associate Research Scholar at Yale Law School, was targeted by an artificial intelligence-based news site called Jewish Onliner that smeared her as a terrorist for her outspoken defense of Palestinian rights and denunciations of both Israel and the US government for the genocide in Gaza.

On March 3, the Yale University administration accepted the lies published by Jewish Onliner and moved swiftly to put Dr. Doutaghi on administrative leave, revoke her access to email and ban her from the campus. After she was suspended a week later, Dr. Doutaghi and her lawyer Eric Lee issued statements in response which were posted on Twitter.

In the course of the 15-minute "Rising" interview, Lee pushed back on repeated attempts by the program hosts, Amber Duke and Niall Stanage, to insist that the lies by Jewish Onliner were either legitimate or had to be answered. Lee insisted that his client has no obligation to answer questions related to the slander campaign mounted by an online bot that is likely an operation of Israeli military-intelligence.

For example, when host Stanage asked Lee if the assertions by Jewish Onliner that Dr. Doutaghi was a member of a terrorist organization, "Is that complete fiction that your client has any connection to?" Lee responded,

"Have you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?" These are the types of questions that my client isn't obligated to respond to. She's made a very clear statement on Twitter on that. She is not a member of any organization that would constitute a violation of law.

I don't know how this AI bot came up with the claim that she is a terrorist. And again, I think again that that's the line that's coming from the White House. Mahmoud Khalil was dragged out of his home away from his eight-and-a-half-month pregnant wife earlier on the basis of a claim by Marco Rubio that he's a terrorist.

So, no, we reject entirely and emphatically this McCarthyite claim that any speech in support of the cause of the people of Palestine and against this government of Israel constitutes terrorism.

This was followed by a question from host Duke, "But is she or is she not affiliated with that group?" to which Lee said,

But if you actually talk about the type of association that's being made by Yale and by the Trump administration, it's that participating in a demonstration—and this coming right from the Senior Counsel to the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, if they still have the guts to call it that—if you're a citizen and you attend

a demonstration, you are a Hamas terrorist, you're going to go to jail not for hours but for years. That's the line coming out of this administration.

Further on in the interview, Lee said,

This was a total railroading and a witch-hunt. ... Dr. Doutaghi has not been accused of committing any crime, she's been admitted to the United States repeatedly, she has been loud and clear about her pro-Palestinian, anti-imperialist speech.

She was clear about that with Yale Law School when they hired her in October 2023, and we do not feel, as a matter of principle, that it's appropriate to put her in the position where she suddenly has to justify potential meetings she's attended. Those are the exact types of questions that were asked by HUAC. ...

If we are going to stop the attack on democracy and the march toward dictatorship in this country, it means taking a very principled position that we're not going to tolerate being intimidated like that, that we're going against attempts to suppress pro-Palestinian, socialist and left-wing speech.



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