Trump administration revokes student visas at universities across Michigan

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Last week, the Trump administration revoked hundreds of student visas across the US, expanding its assault on democratic rights. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, speaking to the media last week, said, “They’re visitors to the country… If they’re taking activities that are counter to our foreign—to our national interest, to our foreign policy—we’ll revoke the visa.” Rubio included among such thought crimes pro-Palestinian views and opposition to the US/Israeli genocide in Gaza.

Rubio makes such claims based on the Trump administration’s employment of a seldom-used provision in the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act. The provision enables the US Secretary of State to personally approve the deportation of legal immigrants based on their “past, current, or expected beliefs, statements, or associations,” if it is determined that their presence would “compromise a compelling United States foreign policy interest.”

The political witch-hunt has targeted several major universities across the state of Michigan, including the University of Michigan (U-M), where the federal government has revoked the visas of 22 current and former international students or otherwise terminated their right to remain in the country legally.

Of the 22, 12 are current students and 10 are recent graduates. One student has reportedly already fled the country.

According to the Graduate Employees’ Organization (GEO), an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) covering graduate student workers at U-M, the Trump administration has targeted students who haven’t been politically active on campus.

U-M students and workers have held large protests against the Gaza genocide over the last year-and-a-half. In response, the U-M administration and the multi-millionaires and Democratic Party operatives on the U-M Board of Regents have employed police violence, legal prosecution and university policy changes to crack down on the democratic right of workers and youth to protest and engage in free speech.

Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel, a Democrat, has charged at least 10 U-M protesters with felony crimes at the urging of U-M’s Board of Regents.

On Wednesday, U-M President Santa Ono and three of U-M’s vice presidents released an email letter to all faculty, staff and students responding to reports of visa revocations. While the letter acknowledges the termination of 22 U-M international students’ visas in the last two weeks, Ono and the U-M administration offer no opposition to the fascistic witch-hunting of students and workers for thought crimes.

The letter cynically states in its closing lines:

> In challenging times like this, we call on each of you to show each other compassion, recognize the value each of us brings to our community, and draw strength from one another as we work to live up to our values and move forward together.

The U-M administration and the Democratic Party are complicit in Trump’s authoritarian agenda and are actively working to facilitate it. In March, U-M announced the sudden ending of its $236 million Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) program in a complete capitulation to the Trump administration’s dictates. It did so in large part to convince Trump not to block billions of dollars in government grants to the university.

Beyond U-M, at least five other universities across the state have reported visa revocations. On Monday, Wayne State University President Kimberly Andrews Espy released an email letter to WSU students, faculty and staff

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reporting that four international students had had their visas revoked. Michigan State University also acknowledged that some of its international students have had their visas revoked, but did not specify how many were affected.

Oakland University reported Monday that a student from South Sudan who is a permanent resident of Canada had his visa revoked at the border as he was traveling back to the US from Canada.

Central Michigan University reported Monday that "several" of its current and former international students had their visas and records "terminated" by the government.

On Tuesday, Saginaw Valley State University Vice President for Communications J.J. Boehm reported that two international students had been targeted by the federal government. He said the government had terminated one student's I-20 (Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status), cancelling the student's F-1 visa status.

In all cases, the universities reported they were never directly informed by the Trump administration of the visa cancellations. They were discovered by checking the Department of Homeland Security's Student and Exchange Visitor Information System.

On Thursday, the Michigan American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) launched a federal lawsuit against the Trump administration on behalf of four international students attending Michigan universities. The lawsuit requests an emergency injunction and asks that the court reinstate the students' legal status to allow them to complete their studies in the US.

The ACLU cited the visa revocations at U-M and Wayne State, which the lawsuit claims "violates the students' due process rights because the government is required to provide advance notice and a meaningful opportunity to respond when taking such action."

On April 6, Dearborn attorney Amir Makled, who is representing a pro-Palestinian demonstrator arrested at U-M last year, was detained by federal agents at Detroit Metro Airport. Makled was returning from a personal trip to the Dominican Republic with his family.

According to Makled, federal agents held him for over 90 minutes, interrogated him about his clients, and demanded that he relinquish his cell phone. Makled noted that the information requested by the agents included his phone contact list, which he refused to give. The agents also demanded that he surrender his phone, which he refused.

As these attacks were taking place across the state, Democratic Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer made a trip to Washington D.C. with the Republican speaker of the Michigan House of Representatives, Matt Hall.

While in Washington, Whitmer gave a speech praising United Auto Workers President and Trump supporter Shawn Fain and appealed for cooperation with the Trump administration and the Republicans. Speaking positively of a prior meeting with Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Vice President JD Vance's visit to Michigan, Whitmer declared, "There's a lot more common ground here than we think... our people are not as divided as our politics."

Whitmer previously met with Trump in the White House in January. She told the AP that month, "I don't view myself as the leader of the opposition like some might."

On Wednesday, she called for a bipartisan approach to "usher in, as President Trump says, the Golden Age of American manufacturing." Declaring her support for Trump's economic nationalism and his tariffs on autos and steel, she stated, "We do need to make more stuff in America, more cars and chips, more steel and ships. We do need fair trade."

Later on Wednesday, she allowed herself to be used as a prop by Trump at an Oval Office ceremony at which he signed two executive orders targeting political critics and once again denounced the 2020 election as rigged. "She's really done an excellent job," Trump said of Whitmer," [A] very good person."

Whitmer is considered a leading contender for the Democratic Party presidential nomination in the 2028 national elections. Her speech and her Oval Office appearance brand her and her party as collaborators and accomplices with the fascistic Trump administration and the Republican Party.

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