

By Chuck Turchick

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Dear Humphrey School Faculty, Fellows Staff and PASA members,

April 17 will be a sad day for the University of Minnesota and in particular for the Humphrey School of Public Affairs. That is when Dr. Condoleezza Rice, at the Humphrey School's invitation, will deliver a Distinguished Carlson Lecture as part of the month-long series of events commemorating the reopening of Northrop Auditorium.

The university is a place where ideas get tested, where multiple viewpoints are welcomed. In such a setting, opposition to a speaker seems to violate the very essence of the institution.

But I oppose this invitation and in fact believe the University of Minnesota would be doing a valuable service to humanity by withdrawing it, no matter how awkward that might be at this late date.

This isn't about free speech, a diversity of viewpoints, excluding voices, or discouraging dialogue. Rather, it's about the University becoming associated with abhorrent conduct done in our names.

This isn't about suppressing free speech. Dr. Rice will continue to have no shortage of available forums in which to express her views. Her perspective will be heard, as it was last week when she warned against America becoming war-weary. Moreover, "free speech" being raised in the context of a \$150,000 fee seems a bit ironic, if not oxymoronic.

This isn't about hearing a diversity of perspectives. The topic of her speech will have

nothing to do with the objectionable and probably criminal conduct she engaged in as President George W. Bush's National Security Advisor. An opportunity to address the Northrop audience on those issues for 5-7 minutes was requested by opponents of the invitation but denied by those who invited Dr. Rice. As moderator of the event, Dean Schwartz cannot be expected to challenge Dr. Rice's version of her conduct, if that conduct even gets mentioned. The Dean was among those who invited her. To challenge her vigorously would be like inviting someone over for dinner and then lambasting them for conduct of years earlier for which they had never been held to account. A genuine dialogue or exchange of ideas about Dr. Rice's conduct while in government would surely be in keeping with what a university should do, but that won't happen here.

This isn't about Dr. Rice's ideas; it's about her conduct. Dr. Rice chaired the Principals Committee of the National Security Council, the key body that approved the interrogation program that Major General Antonio Taguba called a "systematic regime of torture." Dr. Rice has said her decisions were always pending legal approval.

But as University of Minnesota Professor Emeritus of Political Science Kathryn Sikkink has written, from the beginning the legal approval was intended as legal immunity, a "get-out-of-jail-free" card. Dr. Rice herself, in her 2011 memoir *No Higher Honor*, expressed concerns about the legal interpretations being infected by Vice President Cheney's legal counsel David Addington. She writes about Addington's "bureaucratic warfare" and determination "to push the boundaries of executive authority" and even outflank the Attorney General. Clearly, as Dr. Rice well knew, the "legal approval" was the "wink-and-a-nod" type of legal approval, not serious legal advice.

This isn't about Dr. Rice; it's about the University of Minnesota. In describing his opposition to torture, John McCain famously said: "This is not about terrorists; it's about us." Similarly, in a very real sense, this invitation is not about Dr. Rice; it's about us, the University of Minnesota community, its students, its faculty, its staff, its alumni, and its good name. Dr. Rice's conduct and the conduct of other high Bush administration officials has resulted in no accountability -- no criminal accountability, no civil accountability, no official commission of inquiry -- in large part due to the current administration. Not only were there possible war crimes committed with no accountability, but they occurred in conjunction with the first public proclamation by a Geneva Conventions signatory nation engaged in a war saying the Conventions did not apply to them. The University's invitation will be seen as condoning not only the conduct, but also the lack of accountability and the attitude that the United States is above the law. that the rules don't apply to us.

This is as much about the future as it is about the past: lives are at stake. Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and former U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, spoke at the University in April 2011. In a dialogue following her talk, she said that when the United States falls short in upholding human rights standards, there is "a tsunami of bad practice around the world." She said that post-9/11, when as High Commissioner she confronted governments on their human rights abuses, she

would be told, "No, times have changed." And I would say, "No they have not. There's nothing changed in your obligations or in the Covenant [on Civil and Political Rights] or Convention [Against Torture]." And they would say, "Well, look at the United States." And that was said over and over again. It was really hard to even understand the damage that was done. And then I was hearing from rapporteurs, from the committees, the same thing -- that the standards were being undermined because of a change in behavior by a country that is looked to as the standard bearer in implementing these standards."

The University must be independent, but it is not isolated from society at large. What happens on campus has consequences. I don't want to be overly dramatic, but people will die as a result of the University's and the Humphrey School's decision. We won't know who they are or how much they suffered, but it will happen.

I don't want to put even more pressure on you, but as military, diplomatic, and legal experts have often pointed out, also at stake are the lives of our own soldiers, the cooperation of our allies, and the rule of law.

On the other hand, if the University and the Humphrey School make the statement that needs to be made, our country may be seen across the world as having taken one small step toward saying, "Yes, our officials -- and we as a nation -- ought to be held accountable too."

I urge you to express your views, whatever they may be, to Dean Schwartz. It is not too late for the University or for the United States to get back on the path that leads to justice, that promotes human rights and begins to restore our image around the world.

Finally, this Thursday, the University Senate will be voting on a resolution deploring this

invitation. Let your three Humphrey School senators -- Stacey Grimes, Greta Friedemann-Sanchez, and Maria Hanratty -- know what you think. I have heard that there already has been some dialogue within the School about the invitation to Dr. Rice. That can only be healthy. Regrettably, no such similar dialogue will occur with Dr. Rice on April 17 at Northrop Auditorium.

Sincerely,

Chuck Turchick
U of M Alumnus