

President Steven Knapp
The George Washington University
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Washington, DC 20052
October 10, 2011

President Knapp:

We are writing this letter to express our disapproval with this year's Colonials Weekend speaker, Mr. Bill Maher.

As you may be aware, Mr. Maher caters to a small group of individuals who excoriate any and all religious beliefs. Mr. Maher is a person who constantly mocks and demonizes people of religion. He has even gone as far to say that individuals who choose to adhere to a religious faith or ideology have "neurological disorders". This is not someone who exhibits a balanced view of politics or social issues. Mr. Maher is certainly entitled to his own opinion, but we do not feel that he is an appropriate entertainer for a weekend that is supposed to be family-oriented. When the University is hosting an event that is presumed to cater to the whole student body, it should select speakers that appeal to all students. Past speakers like Jimmy Fallon and even Jon Stewart, have been welcomed by all students. But a man who publicly expresses how "alarmed" he is over the popularity of the name "Mohammed" in the UK, calls the Quran a "hate filled book", accuses the Pope of having been a Nazi, and argues that Christians are people who "hate charity" and "love killing people", is not welcomed by most. Bill Maher is not a comedian, he is a political commentator who seeks to spread his atheist beliefs, hence his documentary "Religulous."

We feel as if the students and parents with a religious background were not calculated into the equation when the decision was made to bring Mr. Maher to keynote what is supposed to be the largest, most inclusive family event the university holds. The speaker the university brings to keynote the much-anticipated Parent's Weekend is a representation of GW and our student body. We feel that Bill Maher and his intolerance towards religious people is a poor representation of our student body, and portrays our university as an institution that harbors an intolerance for diversity. As GW students, we take pride in knowing that we are part of an institution that champions diversity and tolerance, but we feel that the decision to bring this speaker to campus gravely violates both of these principles.

We want to know that the university will acknowledge our presence on campus when selecting speakers for future events like this one. We would like you to voice your commitment to ensuring that future speakers for Colonials Weekend and Commencement ceremonies will be tolerant of all religions and beliefs. You have pledged your commitment for increasing diversity on campus; we hope that you will do the same for religious tolerance.

Below are the signatures of student organizations that are equally concerned about the decision to invite Mr. Maher as the keynote speaker for Colonial Weekend.

We appreciate your attention to this matter.

GW Young America's Foundation – GW College Republicans
Knights of Columbus – Newman Catholic Student Center