



Contact UDemsTX@gmail.com  
www.udemstx.com

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### **Statement over Protests on Campus**

*Shame. Shame on UT Austin. Shame on Greg Abbott. Shame on Jay Hartzell. Shame on Texas leaders for the naked assault of free speech on our University.*

On Wednesday, April 24th, UT Austin students attempted to peacefully protest on campus yesterday against US foreign policy and Israel and Palestine, as well as for the UT and A&M joint investment fund, UTIMCO, to divest from weapon manufacturers. Before they even gathered, students were met with hundreds of DPS, APD, and UTPD officers, who were sent at the request of Greg Abbott and UT President Jay Hartzell.

Students' right to free speech and peaceful assembly was brutally assaulted by the top political leaders of Texas - *before the protest even started*. Over 50 peaceful protesters were arrested, including a local news journalist.

*These protests were far from violent*. They were peaceful, with teach-ins and art workshops scheduled. The only threats yesterday came from the sheer number of police in tactical gear armed with batons, pepper spray, and riot shields. They were sent to intimidate and escalate with the full force of the State.

Yesterday, Monday, April 29th, hundreds of state troopers in tactical gear arrived on the 40 Acres to quash peaceful protests for the second time in five days.

This time, troops pepper-sprayed students repeatedly and intermittently used stun grenades. In total, 79 students were arrested on campus, many of which remain in custody today.

Peaceful protests were held on campus Thursday and Friday without escalation. Once again, the arrival of DPS and APD officers dramatically escalated tensions on campus as they began arresting students.

We saw our classmates dragged away. Our friends with pepper spray dripping from their eyes. Our professors writing down the names of those arrested. We have never felt so ashamed of our university, but at the same time, felt so inspired by the courage of our peers.

Many college campuses across the state have held sit-ins and protests. UT Austin was the only one met with such a brutal display of force from those meant to protect us.

It is our understanding that as of August 2020, the UT and A&M Investment Management Company (UTIMCO) held millions in weapon manufacturing investments. The University Democrats join student calls for divestment from these funds and for an end to the conflict in Israel and Palestine.

We want to thank the many local leaders who stood with students on the right side of history. We especially want to thank the leadership of Sen. Sarah Eckhardt and Rep. Gina Hinojosa who remained on campus through the duration of yesterday's events, along with the diligence of our County Attorney Delia Garza and her staff for ensuring students' constitutional rights are upheld.

The 1st amendment is a bedrock for our country and our state. Our state leaders have made it clear these rights only apply to views they agree with.

Those ordering egregious acts of violence on students and spreading false information about our campus must be held accountable, legally and *at the ballot box*.