Opening Statements

Kevin Mercadante, Class of 2017 Representative:

I want to first thank all those members of Council with whom we had extensive conversations over the past week and month to better inform the resolution. In particular, I would like to thank Abel, Lizzy and Ziev who were beyond helpful in working through the exact language of the resolution and have really made this resolution something that offers protection to all members of our community. Finally, I would like to more than 100 of our of classmates and peers for taking the time to speak with us and several groups that helped us along the way, including members of the Coalition of Transparency and Accountability, the Gargoyle Society, the Student Athlete Advisory Committee, the Minority Coalition, the Black Student Union, the Junior Advisor Advisory Board, The Muslim Student Association, the Williams Christian Fellowship, the Society of the Griffins, and others. Throughout the process, Hanson and I have very much enjoyed our conversations and appreciated everyone’s feedback.

I would like to address the overall intent of the resolution. Our goal in crafting the resolution was to both enshrine the right to speech on this campus while also protecting individual’s rights to disagree with one another and protest. The resolution stems from months of thought about where Williams stands in the world of discourse that surrounds us. It is in no way a reaction to any events on campus. Neither Hanson nor I have ties to groups that have brought in controversial speakers in the past or are currently affiliated with any groups looking to bring in speakers. Rather, both Hanson and I believe that one of the defining characteristics of our education at Williams was the platform that Williams provided us to engage with a multitude of viewpoints, good, bad and even ugly. Listening to and engaging with these viewpoints proved
instrumental in our liberal arts education and allowed us the space to think critically about the world around us.

Thanks to the help of several CC members, we believe that the language in the resolution as it stands accomplishes our goals. It affirms the right to freedom of speech on campus, while also affirming the rights to protest and disagree with one another. It continues to foster an environment where individuals are able to state opposing views and work together to sort out their differences. It elevates dialogue on this campus. It unambiguously expresses our disdain for speech that encourages violence or prejudice towards others. We recognize that institutional barriers exist both at Williams and around the world and believe that this resolution affirms the voices of all individuals and protects those marginalized voices who promote ideas outside of the widely-held norms.

Hanson and I believe that this statement ought to take the form of a CC resolution. It is true that there is no way for CC to enforce this resolution. It is true that this resolution will directly change the way we have conversations. Let me be clear that the intention is not to police the tone of debate or have CC restrict discussion on this campus. Instead, this resolution is College Council proactively making a statement to the administration, alumni, and the world at large that at Williams, we are ensuring that no one encroaches on the space that is necessary for dialogue and debate to occur and flourish.

Writing a CC resolution is not something that either of us takes lightly. We hope that our efforts to reach out to every member of council over the last week, our desire to include as many voices in the conversation as possible, and our willingness to adapt the language so that it more
clearly defined its intention and more thoroughly protects the speech of all individuals shows how strongly we believe that this is the right thing for CC to do. Thank you.

Hanson Koota, Class of 2017 Representative:

As my college career comes to a close I have been thinking back on what I have truly enjoyed about my experience here. I have come to realize that the times that I have enjoyed the most have not been large events or games; they have been the conversations that I have had. Some serious, most not, but all valuable in themselves.

This resolution serves as a statement to the Administration, Faculty and Alumni reaffirming the student body’s recognition of the value of free, open and honest dialogue on campus. A value that is the bedrock of education at our school and in our society. It is a statement that our community is one that is receptive of all ideologies and is one that encourages the free exchange of ideas.

In 4 weeks, Kevin and I will be leaving the college. We did not write this resolution for ourselves, we wrote it because we care about the school. I have loved my time here, and I will truly miss the types of conversations that I have been able to have here.

This resolution affirms Williams as not only the model of what the a leading educational institution should be, but also defines the values that we as a community should strive for.