

**Testimony Before United States Senate
Committee on Environment and Public Works
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Chairman Inhofe, Ranking Member Jeffords and distinguished members of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works: My name is David Skorton, and I am President of The University of Iowa. I am also a physician and professor in the Colleges of Medicine and Engineering. I am honored to have been asked to provide testimony today concerning a series of events on The University of Iowa campus and in our community of Iowa City, Iowa, triggered by a destructive break-in at one of our campus research facilities. This incident raises a variety of issues related to academic freedom, a safe working and living environment, the place of civil disobedience on a university campus and, most importantly, the future environment and accessibility of a publicly supported institution of higher education.

In the early morning hours of Sunday, November 14, 2004, three or more individuals, later claiming to represent the Animal Liberation Front, broke into our Seashore Hall and Spence Laboratories facility, including research laboratories associated with the Department of Psychology. The intruders smashed and overturned equipment and poured acid and other chemicals on equipment and papers. Over 300 rodents were removed from the facility. Many of these rodents, purpose-bred for research and being cared for by faculty members, veterinarians and other animal care professionals, likely suffered and died as a result of this action. The

individuals also broke into faculty offices, dumped books, research materials, and computers on the floor, and poured acid on these items.

The University of Iowa Police in conjunction with the State of Iowa Department of Criminal Investigation involved the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which was central to this investigation of domestic terrorism. Many other health and safety officials were also involved. All affected units had to be temporarily closed or relocated, including offices, classrooms, research labs and psychology clinics. Not only was research disrupted, but the academic activities and careers of faculty, undergraduate and graduate students and post-doctoral trainees were impaired, in some cases adding months to the conduct of their federally funded, peer-reviewed research.

Four days after the break-in, on Thursday, November 18, individuals claiming responsibility for this act sent an e-mail to multiple local and national media outlets. The e-mail claimed responsibility on behalf of ALF for the vandalism on the facility. It also included the names, home addresses, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, and spouse's or partner's names for Psychology Department faculty who conduct animal research, as well as for some graduate students and laboratory assistants. Publicizing this personal information was blatant intimidation. It was also successful, as these individuals are still being harassed and are still concerned about their own safety, as well as their families'. To cite one example of harassment, five faculty members as well as some of their spouses received a total of over 400 unsolicited magazine subscriptions under the "bill me later" option. In terms of safety issues, numerous researchers are even concerned about allowing their children to play in their own yards.

In addition to the human cost to the researchers, their colleagues and families, the total direct costs for the incident are approximately \$450,000. The cost for the chemical cleanup, both by our own Health Protection Office and outside contractors, is estimated at \$150,000. The cost to our Department of Public Safety, including increased contract-based security on campus, is approximately \$25,000, and replacement estimates for equipment and supplies are over \$250,000. With this incident prompting a review of all of our security measures, the eventual cost for additional research facility protection will be much more. What cannot be measured in monetary terms is the loss of progress in research.

Because the vandalized research space is located within a larger shared-use academic building, the work of dozens of faculty, staff and students who were not in any way connected to the research was disrupted for many days during a very busy time of the academic year while health and safety officials cleared the building. Though the destruction was to research equipment and materials, it is clear from the videos the group provided to the media that the message of fear and intimidation was meant for a much larger audience—the University as a whole and the general public.

Was this an act of either informed debate or civil disobedience? I think not. As a long-time student of the writings of Mohandas K. Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., I recognize several critical and undeniable differences between the criminal behavior that is the focus of my comments and that of classic practitioners of civil disobedience.

First, the perpetrators of the vandalism at our University took no personal responsibility for the acts, but performed the actions wearing ski masks or other garments to protect their identities. At the heart of Gandhi's philosophy of non-violent resistance was openness and forthrightness in one's actions, "daring to do the right and facing consequences whether it is in matters social, political or other."¹ Second, direct intimidation of the researchers and their families, intended to cause fear and personal anxiety, was a deliberate tactic in our case. To my knowledge, such personal and familial intimidation has never been a feature of the nonviolent civil disobedience respected in our country. Third, and perhaps most ironically, the attack occurred on a campus which has for decades prided itself on exceeding federal regulations regarding the humane care and use of animals in research and teaching.

If not civil disobedience, what was this action? In my estimation it was, purely and simply, a criminal act meant to disrupt an endeavor which is highly valued by our society. In the face of society's support for this research, the illegal tactics of a violent group have been unsuccessful in eradicating it.

¹Attributed to Mohandas K. Gandhi by the Official Mahatma Gandhi eArchive and Reference Library of the Mahatma Gandhi Foundation of Mumbai, India at <http://www.mahatma.org.in/quotes/quotes.jsp?link=qt>.

Let us explore for a moment the place of public civil discourse in the nationwide discussion on the use of animals in research and teaching. Thanks to effective interactions among researchers,

administrators, and constructive animal welfare groups, the handling and use of research animals have been greatly improved in recent decades. Animal Care and Use Committees at institutions receiving federal funding are responsible for extremely careful review and approval, disapproval or modification of all proposals to use animals in research. On the University of Iowa campus, training in the handling of research animals is mandatory before principal investigators, researchers, or other personnel can acquire a single animal for research or teaching activities. In addition, these committees conduct ongoing monitoring of activities in which animals are used for research and educational purposes. Many campuses, including The University of Iowa, have gone beyond these regulations by, for example, seeking and obtaining voluntary accreditation with the Association for Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care International, Inc.

What has been the result on our campus of the deplorable criminal action by a group of vandals acting in the dark of night, taking no responsibility for their actions?

First, the environment for researchers at The University of Iowa has been permanently altered. These researchers, who have devoted their careers to fundamental and applied research directed at increasing the corpus of life science knowledge and improving health for animals and humans, now live lives of fear and anger. Second, the University and federal and state taxpayers indirectly have had to spend funds that were, in essence, wasted on the sequelae of this action rather than on advancing the state of animal and human health. This, no doubt, was part of the strategy of the organization at work. Third, in the wake of many other national security issues, this action

and others like it add to the increasingly significant changes in the openness of American university campuses. No longer can those of us in positions of responsibility consider our campuses to be largely open areas, and we must increasingly consider security concerns that affect the openness of the environment.

Most importantly, what has not changed and will not change is that The University of Iowa is completely and unalterably committed to allowing faculty, staff and students to pursue their chosen research that is scientifically sound, legal and humane. When there are problems in the conduct of animal research at our University, they are identified, corrected and handled by a well-established system of peer review and administrative oversight. This criminal act will do nothing but strengthen our resolve to stand behind the principles of academic freedom in conducting publicly supported research toward the advancement of knowledge and the improvement of animal and human health.

Thank you.