



Tuesday, October 27, 2026

Dear Cornell University Board of Trustees:

We write as faculty, who have devoted much of our professional lives to co-creating a community at Cornell dedicated to cultivating curiosity, uplifting discovery, and nurturing students to go out into this world to “do the greatest good.” We are compelled to write about the lasting harm inflicted on our students by sexual violence on our campus and the failure of Cornell’s leadership in their response, which has created a second crisis on top of the first.

We acknowledge the constraints on the administration’s speech and actions imposed by student privacy law, due process, and the obligation to act on facts. Regardless of what the courts decide after due process is followed, the men directly involved—and everyone who saw the Snapchat yet did nothing—at the very least violated the expectations we have of all Cornellians. There is no ambiguity about that. Cornellians everywhere needed to hear President Kotlikoff and Vice President Ryan Lombardi say so plainly and forcefully, and to be unambiguous in taking responsibility from the day the story broke.

Cornell’s response left an appearance of insufficient transparency and accountability, and of a focus on “damage control” that has profoundly exacerbated the tragic and indefensible damage already done. It is undoing in real time the communities our alumni, faculty, students and staff have spent years building. The administration’s failure to engage directly with the difficult situation it was responsible for addressing has undermined and continues to undermine the ideals of leadership we teach our students every day.

What our community needed was clear leadership; instead, it faced a leadership vacuum. Jane Doe’s lawsuit came to national attention on September 18. President Kotlikoff’s [video statement](#) came 15 days later, after social media had completely taken over the story and students still could not sort out the basic facts of what was happening. That video was too little, too late: language that did not convey sufficient accountability or meet our community’s need for clear leadership in this moment. The [October 6 “town hall”](#)—actually a webinar consisting of one-way communication, dense legal information, and promises of action read from a script—did not provide the direct, responsive communication our community needed. This lack of leadership, when Cornell needs it most, has exploded a difficult moment of reckoning and

accountability into a collective identity and reputation crisis from which it will take many years and even more dollars to recover.

In his [address to the Cornell Faculty Senate](#), President Kotlikoff did acknowledge missteps in the response to this crisis, but this acknowledgement was quickly followed by an argument for how a change in leadership at this moment would destabilize the university. We argue that President Kotlikoff's resignation would *improve* stability by resolving an on-going crisis of legitimacy and recognizing a failure of leadership. We do not support waiting for the results of the independent review being led by Sally Yates. While we hope this report will bring insights we can build on in the future, and may possibly reveal that leadership believed they were following an appropriate process at the time, we know *now* that the past process was not sufficient. No outcome of the Special Committee would change our opinion that we urgently need to act now to restore confidence in Cornell leadership, both locally with our students and faculty, and externally in the greater international community.

In this explosive moment, Cornell *can* make a choice to do better. We recognize President Kotlikoff's many years of dedicated service and his contributions to Cornell's academic mission, as well as the extraordinary and conflicting pressures he has faced, including serious disruption to federal research funding. The willingness to confront external pressures must be matched by a willingness to confront harmful conduct within our own community, including its fraternities. This failure does not erase the good he has done, nor should our call for accountability be read as a dismissal of that service. Our concern is that his response lacked the clarity of judgment and decisive action that this moment required of Cornell's president. Yet overlooking this failure would undermine the standard of accountability we expect of university leadership. For that reason, we believe President Kotlikoff should be asked to resign. *But* for that to not be a hollow action, the Board of Trustees must hear the faculty: find us a new president who articulates and shares their moral compass, whose actions convey their empathy and humanity, and who takes effective action that places student well-being, safety, and education front and center. We will not accept another leader whose reliance on legal advice and concern for the institution's reputation displace the responsibility to recognize, denounce, and act upon wrongdoing.

Predictably, this failed leadership approach has actually caused immeasurable harm to that very reputation. We need leaders who will carry the heavy responsibility of leading this great university with grace and think to themselves the next time they

make a decision in a difficult situation: How do we not just to get our university “through this,” but do the right thing and *play a leading role nationally* to move from failing our young people to lifting them up? Let's make Cornell the place where things start to change.

Signed by women leaders from science and engineering:

Alyssa Apsel, IBM Professor of Engineering, School of Electrical and Computer Engineering, COE

Nicole Benedek, Associate Professor, Dept. of Materials Science and Engineering, COE

Judy Cha, Rick and Betty Tsai PhD 1981 Professor of Materials Science and Engineering, COE

Julia Dshemuchadse, Associate Professor, Dept. of Materials Science and Engineering, COE

Brooke Duffy, Professor, Department of Communication, CALS

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Katja Nowack, Associate Professor, Dept. of Physics, A&S

J. Ritchie Patterson, Helen T. Edwards Professor of Physics, A&S

Ruth Richardson, Associate Professor, School of Civil and Environmental Engineering, COE

Anna Scaglione, Stephen M. Ross/Related Companies Professor, School of Electrical and Computer Engineering, Cornell Tech

Britney Schmidt, Professor, Earth and Atmospheric Science and Astronomy, COE and A&S

Meredith Silberstein, Professor, Sibley School of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering, COE

Andrea Stevenson Won, Associate Professor, Department of Communication, CALS, Field of Information Science

H. Grace Xing, W.L. Quackenbush Professor of Engineering, Dept of Materials Science and Engineering and School of Electrical and Computer Engineering, COE

Rong Yang, Marjorie L. Hart Professor of Engineering, Dept of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering, COE