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► Editorial

Golf facility cancellation reminds students of the importance of free-speech climate



UConn community members come together to protest the proposed plan to build a new golf course on the UConn Connifer Collection. The golf course is no longer set to be built upon the Connifer Collection land. PHOTO COURTESY OF COLIN HAMILTON, WEEKLY COLUMNIST/THE DAILY CAMPUS

On Sept. 8, the University of Connecticut published a cancellation notice in the Environmental Monitor for the construction of the proposed East Road golf facility. The golf facility had faced widespread criticism from state health agencies, watchdog groups and members of the state legislature due to its potentially negative environmental impact.

The cancellation marked the triumphant end of a nearly four-and-a-half month grassroots campaign organized by UConnifers: a coalition of students and local community members who worked to draw attention to the project's environmental concerns. The Editorial Board commends these students for their commitment to political activism and environmental justice.

The broader implications of this victory for student activism at UConn require attention. In recent years, student activism has suffered — a rippling effect of our administration's repression of student protests against Israel's oppression of the Palestinian people in 2024. The protest, which consisted of a peaceful encampment located near Dove Tower, ended in the arrest of 25 UConn students, with charges of disorderly conduct and criminal trespass.

UConn's administration responded to this peaceful protest by shaping policies to create a high barrier of entry to all on-campus demonstrations. Among the policies implemented were restrictions on sign

postage, amplified sound and certain outdoor gatherings. These changes drew reproach from both on-campus student groups and labor unions.

With this negative environment for activist expression, it is no surprise that UConn is considered to have poor First Amendment expression on campus. The Foundation of Individual Rights and Expression, a non-partisan nonprofit civil liberties organization, ranked UConn at just 195 out of 261 schools surveyed for campus speech climate in its 2026 report. On its report card, UConn received an "F." This failing grade is attributed to both campus policy and a lack of institutional neutrality.

The successful student campaign run against the golf facility on East Road, however, shows that students can rise above our campus's administrative norms when exercising their free speech. Ultimately, what UConnifer achieved was not unique, nor did it benefit from luck or any strategy not available to other students. In the context of previous activist groups, UConnifer's campaign was small, sporadic and at times lackluster. The group's most notable event, a protest last April, amounted to only a few dozen active participants. The majority of the group's outreach consisted of media outreach, research, and petitioning — small and targeted tasks which were scattered across a timeline of several months. Internally, it suffered from leadership discrepancies and scheduling issues.

In this sense, the UConn

nifer case study represents the "everyman" of student organizing. Any one student advocating for any one cause has the potential to find the same success that those advocating against the East Road golf facility did. The path set by UConnifer represents not only a chance for students to find their political voice in an increasingly partisan world, but also offers students the chance to break through the speech climate barrier outlined by the FIRE report. Regardless of the cause advanced by UConn students, The Editorial Board believes that using the right of exercising free speech by students on campus is a catalyst for sparking meaningful political change. Furthermore, The Editorial Board asserts that peaceful student activism is both a civic right and a personal responsibility — and cannot be taken away by any one institution.

The Editorial Board encourages students to look towards the example set by the students behind UConnifer. While the golf campaign has ended, the need for outspoken voices has not. Our nation relies on civic participation to ensure its envisioned founding liberties are upheld, and to ensure that all voices are represented in its decision-making. The college campus is an ideal playground for the development of this participation and warrants involvement. As The Daily Campus is a medium for free speech in and off itself, The Editorial Board once again reminds all students of the importance of the First Amendment right to protest and activism.

UConn pedestrians need safety measures now

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If you own a car on campus, you have probably experienced the terror of driving on and around campus after dark on a weekend. Driving in Mansfield is like playing a much less entertaining version of Mario Kart, where instead of dodging bananas and shells, you're dodging inebriated young adults on a winding and pitch-black road.

While navigating these roads is nerve-racking for drivers, the conditions are even more precarious for the students walking alongside them. When the police bust off-campus parties, it creates a massive wave of students walking on the poorly lit outskirts of campus. Ride shares on Uber or Lyft are often unavailable or prohibitively expensive due to the influx of requests, and students are forced to wander down the shoulder-less roads of Mansfield to find a spot where they can be picked up.

While it would be easy to blame the students who drink before walking around campus and run across the road, the real problem is that the roads surrounding the University of Connecticut are ill-equipped to handle the pedestrian traffic that comes with being a college town. Mansfield and Connecticut must prioritize effective lighting and strategically placed sidewalks to protect students and drivers alike.

In the past three years, UConn and the Town of Mansfield have proposed and secured funding for pedestrian and cyclist safety projects, including projects on the three main roads that lead into campus: South Eagleville and the Four Corners intersection of Route 195, which are owned and managed by the Connecticut Department of Transportation and Discovery Drive which is owned by UConn. The South Eagleville improvements came in the wake of a pedestrian fatality in 2021, but weren't completed until 2025.

While I recognize that gathering funding without frustrating taxpayers is difficult for Connecticut's representatives, UConn pedestrians and drivers cannot wait years for projects to be started and completed. Storrs and the surrounding area already represent a hotspot in crash data.

As UConn's population continues to increase, and as off-campus housing de-

mand increases, more pedestrians will rely on measures to keep them safe. It makes no sense to wait for a tragedy to start construction. One pedestrian injured or dead is one too many.

In addition to the multi-use path planned for Route 195 at Four Corners, pedestrians would benefit from increased lighting on Hunting Lodge Road around the intersection with North Eagleville, which is owned by the Town of Mansfield. Several fraternity houses line this road, and in my experience, students and members tend to gather there at night.

Additionally, Ubers are frequently called to the location, creating a situation ripe for disaster. The situation in this area is so dire that I am aware of some fraternities that assign risk management team members to stand in the driveway and prevent students from wandering into the road.

Simply adding streetlights and crosswalks is not enough. During the night and on poorly lit roads, uncontrolled crosswalks (crosswalks without traffic control devices) are hidden behind hills and are haphazardly placed in non-intersection areas, particularly on Route 195 and North Eagleville Road.

According to the United States Department of Transportation, these types of crosswalks represent 72% of pedestrian fatalities. To follow the Federal Highway Administration recommendations and better protect students, UConn should evaluate these existing crosswalks for additions like flashing lights to indicate use and pedestrian refuge islands. Crosswalks are only useful when drivers know that they exist.

UConn, CTDOT and the Town of Mansfield have already identified the need for increased pedestrian safety and more pedestrian infrastructure, but student safety is not something that can wait.

The voices of students and residents should be heard in prioritizing construction and funds, so that road owners can implement changes in a timely manner. Whether students are walking home from a party or a late-night study session, they deserve to make it home safely, and drivers deserve to navigate at night without fearing that someone will appear in their headlights.

