

Fact check on WSJ OpEd

“All advertising about “Health, Wealth, and Happiness” was scrubbed from campus walls and digital flyers.”

—Barrett, the Honors College at Arizona State University advertised this event as it typically does for any event, with physical flyers, digital flyers, and announcements in the Honors e-newsletter. It was also advertised through Ticketmaster (since tickets were sold) and with digital ads. At one point, the physical flyers posted around Barrett were removed, by unknown individuals —it certainly wasn't at the behest of “university administration,” as the editorial implies.

“Behind closed doors, deans pressured me to postpone the event indefinitely.”

—The Dean of Barrett, the Honors College never encouraged Ms. Atkinson to postpone or cancel the event. When Ms. Atkinson started receiving emails protesting the event, she called the Dean and said that she wanted to cancel it because the viewpoints being criticized weren't what the center stood for or what she stood for. Because the university had been so firm that the event would continue in line with ASU's free speech policy, Dean Williams reached out to the Provost; after that conversation, the Dean advised Ms. Atkinson to talk with Tom Lewis before making any decision about the event. Ms. Atkinson expressed concern that he wouldn't respond well to the growing controversy. After talking with Mr. Lewis, Ms. Atkinson decided she wanted to move forward and so that is what happened.

“I was warned that if the speakers made any political statements, it wouldn't be in the Lewis Center's ‘best interests’”

—Because Ms. Atkinson was serving as the moderator of the event, the Dean talked with her about keeping the focus on the “health, wealth, and happiness” topic.

“There were no protests, no disturbances, and no traumatized students.”

—There were peaceful protests, both outside and inside the event. While we cannot speak to the adjective “traumatized,” the Dean's office at Barrett did receive emails from students who were deeply concerned about the event and the speakers; the Dean worked with our Student Services team and the Dean of Students office to make sure these students were connected to support and resources.

“As of June 30, ASU will dismantle the Lewis Center”

—The donor agreement that initially supported the center was terminated by the donor effective June 30. ASU is working to determine how we can support the most impactful elements of the center without that external funding; the Dean of Barrett has formed a task force to make recommendations along those lines. The classes associated with the Lewis Center remain on the schedule and will be offered this fall. In an email on June 1, the Dean also asked Ms. Atkinson to document “processes that have been effective, potential speakers or programs you were considering for the fall, and any other contacts or information you see as important to the future of the center.”

“despite my raising more than \$500,000 in the last year”

—The former director did not fundraise to fill the gap. She told the dean she thought she could do so but had not connected the dean or foundation with any donors.

—The former director raised only modest funds during her time as ED, almost none of which could be used for her high salary.