

On May 16, 2024, UConn spokesperson Stephanie Reitz announced the relocation of UConn's most prominent "Spirit Rock," formerly located outside of the heavily trafficked North Garage at the entrance of campus. The Spirit Rocks, the Hartford Courant notes, have "served as emblems of free expression for generations of students". In recent months, the Spirit Rock has come under fire from an administration increasingly bent on censoring student speech.

While Reitz's statement suggests that the Spirit Rock was moved due to concerns over traffic safety and an interest in increased visibility, emails obtained by UConnDivest via the Freedom of Information Act reveal just the opposite. In early October, the Arab Students' Association painted the flag of Iraq on the rock which contains the text "God is great" in Arabic. Following October 7, Provost D'Alleva sent numerous emails to other administrators fearmongering over the presence of a Muslim phrase written in Arabic on the spirit rock, spurring on this latest attempt at censorship.

After various groups activist groups wrote messages critical of the UConn administration on the rock throughout October, President Maric, Provost D'Alleva, and Vice President for Student Life & Enrollment Fuerst moved to "retire" the rock entirely. Among these messages were calls for the divestment from the fossil fuel industry from the Fossil Fuel Free UConn coalition during Family Weekend; the message was swiftly painted over by administration. Internal communications from administrators suggest that the administration believed Students for Justice in Palestine, the Iranian Cultural Organization, and Huskies for Israel were responsible for the other successive paintings of the spirit rock. Provost D'Alleva later suggested a more modest proposal – relocating the rock to a "less prominent" and "less visible" location, in stark contrast to the official narrative.

Over the following months, UConn Facilities Operations was documented painting over pro-Palestine & UConn critical messages on the rock on at least three occasions, twice in violation of their own rock painting policy. The final straw appears to have been when UConn community members painted "Gaza, we see you" and "Hands off our students" in reference to the UConn 26, arrested for exercising their right to freedom of speech on the UConn campus.

UConnDivest condemns in the strongest terms the UConn administration's racist, Islamophobic, anti-Palestinian and anti-free speech decision to relocate the Spirit Rock. This is a blatant attempt to suppress the speech that is afforded to students and move the rock away from the eyes of parents, donors, and prospective students touring the university. The administration's internal communications make clear that the move is intended to quiet Arab, Muslim, and Palestinian speech in particular, and speech critical of the UConn administration generally.