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## HARVARD REVERSES COURSE, WILL OFFER POSITION TO CRITIC OF ISRAEL

DECISION FOLLOWS DEBATE OVER WHETHER SCHOOL HAD REJECTED KENNETH ROTH TO SATISFY PRO-ISRAEL DONORS



Harvard's original decision to deny a fellowship to Kenneth Roth led to a campus debate.

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By [Douglas Belkin](#)

Updated Jan. 19, 2023 5:34 pm ET

Harvard University on Thursday said it would extend a fellowship offer to a prominent human-rights advocate, reversing an initial decision that prompted critics to question whether the school had bowed to political pressure from pro-Israel donors.

The issue surfaced this month after *The Nation* published an article saying that Douglas Elmendorf, dean of Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government, vetoed a one-year fellowship for Kenneth Roth, the recently retired executive director of Human Rights Watch, because of Mr. Roth's past criticism of Israel.

A handful of pro-Israel donors hold considerable sway at the school, the article said. Mr. Roth has long been a leading critic of Israel for its handling of [its political and military conflict with Palestinians](#) over land rights, according to the article.

A debate quickly flared up as word circulated that Mr. Roth had been denied a fellowship at the Kennedy School's Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, with many accusing the dean of stifling academic freedom.

Hundreds of Harvard students, alumni and faculty signed an open letter calling on Mr. Elmendorf to resign, saying the dean "has abrogated his responsibility to the HKS community and the principles underpinning free thought in a free society."

On Thursday, Mr. Elmendorf sent a letter to the Harvard Kennedy School community saying he had reversed his decision and would extend an offer to Mr. Roth to serve as a fellow. He denied his earlier veto had anything to do with donors or a desire to suppress debate around Israel and said it was based on his evaluation of Mr. Roth's potential contributions to the school.

"In the case of Mr. Roth, I now believe that I made an error in my decision not to appoint him as a Fellow," he wrote. "I am sorry that the decision inadvertently cast doubt on the mission of the School and our commitment to open debate in ways I had not intended and do not believe to be true."

Mr. Roth, who is now a fellow at the University of Pennsylvania, wrote in an email that he will accept the Harvard fellowship and juggle them.

"My reaction was satisfaction at this positive step but immediate awareness of its limit, because the real issue was never my own fellowship but rather the broader principle of academic freedom, particularly when people with less visibility criticize Israel," he wrote. "I still hope that the Kennedy School, and Harvard more broadly, will find a way to reaffirm their commitment to academic freedom."

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