

The Washington Post

Georgetown Law official resigns, had been cleared in probe into tweets

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June 6, 2022

Days after a Georgetown University Law School administrator was reinstated following a months-long investigation into his tweets, he said he has resigned.

Ilya Shapiro, who was hired to lead the law school's Center for the Constitution starting in February, said Monday in a resignation letter that remaining at the university "has become untenable." He accused law school officials of creating a hostile environment for him because of his political views.

Shortly before his start date, Shapiro came under fire for tweets about President Biden's promise to nominate a Black woman for the Supreme Court. The posts — for which he apologized the next day — included a tweet that suggested Biden nominate the chief judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit instead. "But alas doesn't fit into the latest intersectionality hierarchy so we'll get lesser black woman," Shapiro tweeted. "Thank heaven for small favors?"

His posts prompted accusations of racism. Organizations, including Georgetown's Black Law Students Association, repeatedly called for Shapiro's termination.

William M. Treanor, the law school's dean, said in a statement on Jan. 27 that Shapiro's suggestion that a Black woman could not be the best nominee, along with his use of "demeaning language," was "appalling."

Treanor placed Shapiro on paid administrative leave pending investigations led by the law school's offices of human resources and institutional diversity, equity and affirmative action. Before his Georgetown appointment, Shapiro worked at the Cato Institute as the vice president and director of the Robert A. Levy Center for Constitutional Studies.

University investigators recently found that Shapiro was not "properly subject to discipline" for his January tweets because they were posted before his employment started, thus clearing the

author and lawyer to resume his post, Treanor said in an email to the campus Thursday. On the same day, Shapiro had tweeted that he would go to work Friday.

By Monday, however, he announced that he had resigned.

“You cleared me on a jurisdictional technicality,” Shapiro wrote to Treanor, adding that the report from the diversity office “and your own statements to the Law Center community — implicitly repealed Georgetown’s vaunted Speech and Expression Policy and set me up for discipline the next time I transgress progressive orthodoxy.”

He continued by rejecting the dean’s earlier interpretations of his tweets.

“It’s a complete miscomprehension to read what I said to suggest that ‘the best Supreme Court nominee could not be a Black woman,’ as you did in your very first statement back on January 27, or that I considered all black women to be ‘lesser than’ everyone else,” Shapiro wrote. “Although my tweet was inartful, as I’ve readily admitted many times, its meaning that I considered one possible candidate to be best and thus all others to be less qualified is clear.”

A Georgetown spokesperson said the school “does not prohibit speech based on the person presenting ideas or the content of those ideas, even when those ideas may be difficult, controversial or objectionable.”

The school’s Conservative and Libertarian Student Association in a statement said members are disappointed with the way Georgetown Law handled its investigation, a four-month process the group said was “needlessly cruel and punitive.”

Luke Bunting, a recent graduate and former co-president of the student group, said he’s worried about the message the school is conveying to potential applicants. “It sends the message that free speech at Georgetown Law isn’t really free. It’s subject to the complaints of students or faculty,” said Bunting, 29. He added that some conservative students have said they felt pressure to censor themselves during classroom discussions, fearing their comments would be taken out of context.

“I think that there was a real trumpeting of the worst-faith reading of Ilya’s tweets and that was damaging,” Bunting said. “It’s a real shame and it’s a real loss to the school.”