

# YV REVIEW

Defining the Future of Freedom

The price of free speech on campus

AI's energy future runs on nuclear

When silence follows political violence

Why charter schools still matter



ISSUE NO. 05

Young  Voices

SPRING 2026

April 15, 2026 —

# WELCOME FROM THE DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMS

*Dear Reader,*

The ideas that have long underpinned American prosperity—free markets, individual liberty, and constitutional government—remain as vital as ever. What has changed is how those ideas compete.

In the past six months, Young Voices has accelerated its reach in this new media environment. Since January alone, our network has generated more than 55 million estimated views. That growth is driven by expanding relationships with high-impact outlets. In the UK, our contributors are now securing recurring placements in publications like The Daily Mail, The Independent, and The Daily Telegraph. In the U.S., we continue to place talent in outlets such as Reason, The Hill, USA Today, RealClearPolitics, and The Washington Examiner—often reaching even larger audiences through syndication on platforms like Yahoo News, MSN, and AOL.

But just as important as where ideas appear is how they spread. The liberty movement has long invested in developing ideas; our focus is developing the people who can carry them. To that end, we've begun investing more deliberately in cultivating original voices, not just placing op-eds. This year, we launched a book track to help top contributors produce market-ready proposals, with our first two projects already in the pitching pipeline. We also piloted new approaches to help contributors build direct audiences online—efforts that led to a major step forward: the addition of our first in-house Commentator.

In April, we welcomed independent creator and Young Voices alumna Maggie Anders to the team. Maggie represents the next phase of our model—someone who doesn't just place ideas in the media, but carries them directly to a growing audience online. She will serve both as a public-facing voice and as a model for the kind of talent we aim to develop.

This shift reflects a broader reality. While legacy media still matters, more and more of the conversation is being driven by individuals who can produce compelling, original content for digital platforms. Looking ahead, we are doubling down on talent that won't just comment on the news—but break it. In an era where AI makes derivative content easy, we are investing in what cannot be automated: original reporting, firsthand experience, and authentic storytelling that captures attention and shapes opinion.

The results you see in these pages are just the beginning. We are building a pipeline of communicators who will not only participate in the public debate, but lead it—and ensure that the case for a free society is heard clearly in the digital age. Thank you for making this work possible.

*A. Andrews*

AARON ANDREWS  
DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMS

Young  Voices



# The Telegraph

## PRO-TRANS MOB MADE ME THE MOST HATED STUDENT AT MY UNIVERSITY

THE ORDEAL I SUFFERED AT UCL HAS TAUGHT ME A PAINFUL LESSON: THE PRICE OF FREEDOM CAN BE LOSS OF POPULARITY



### Samiksha Bhattacharjee

*Samiksha has been part of the Young Voices Contributor Program since January 2026. She is a social commentator and student at University College London, exploring economics, politics, and culture from a Gen Z perspective. She's the creator and host of Samiksha's State of the Debate, a video and article series that covers global issues and culture.*

Since I re-started the Libertarian Society at University College London, I seem to have become the most hated person on campus. I have lost friends, my group's treasurer has resigned, and my own students' union has released a public statement implying they are "devastated" that we hosted a speaker who believes in the reality of biological sex.

This, it appears, is what it is like to be a classical liberal at university. For that is all that I am. I cherish the value of free speech, free minds and free markets. I believe that a nation flourishes only when we allow the open exchange of ideas, and embrace economic freedom over state intervention.

Crucially, I do not believe my peers are "evil" simply because they hold different opinions to mine; a grace that the campus Left, in its rush to pathologise dissent, seems increasingly unwilling to return.

So my student union's commitment to so-called "inclusion" specifically excludes people like me. This was made clear when I met with Connie Shaw, the Free Speech Union's external affairs officer, for a coffee before our recent event on women's rights at which she was to be guest speaker.

We sat with a protection officer eyeing us from the corner – a necessity for any woman daring to talk about biological sex on a campus in 2026. As we were taking those precautions, Connie was being added to an Instagram group chat where people, who we believe to be UCL students, suggested she "just needs a d— in her".

But, in the face of all this, Connie's talk did go ahead. Despite a loud street protest outside and interruptions (which were filmed by Connie, see video below) from a member of the audience who tried to claim "no one wants you here", the event was a roaring success.

The union did not think so though. Their "Equity and Inclusion Officer" released a public blog post apologising to the trans and non-binary community for the "objectionable" views expressed at our event. The officer stated she was "truly devastated" that students would find it "hard to trust the union" because the talk went ahead.

As a student who pays thousands of pounds in fees, I have to ask: why does "inclusion" not extend to me? Why am I a "potential harm" to be scrutinised while those sending graphic, sexualised threats to my guests are met with silence?

The hostility extends to the bureaucracy. At a meeting of the union's executive the day before Connie's talk, the president faced a barrage of criticism for simply remarking that there was a "huge community" who wanted it to go ahead. Under pressure, she then felt the need to "clarify" her stance to be more equivocal.

During the discussion, the president admitted the only thing stopping the union from cancelling the event was the law. "There is nothing we can do legally," she said.

One student journalist, describing the internal mood in a university podcast, admitted: "The discussion about this libertarian talk event ran for like an hour, an hour plus... the officers and the SABS [sabbatical officers] were talking and I was like, 'Well, I can't really see a way out of this'".

When they couldn't find a legal "way out", resentment turned to the legislation that was ensuring our event couldn't be cancelled: the clunkily named Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023.

One participant lamented the "somewhat inequitable freedom of speech legal guidelines" in the UK that forced their hand. Most chillingly, the discussion turned to how this event could be a "catalyst for reviewing how the union does things".

The Cheese Grater student magazine has framed us as the villains throughout in its coverage and has refused to give Connie a right of response. One of its writers admitted on the record that "everyone [in the executive] was against this event".

I founded UCL's Libertarian Society to fill an intellectual vacuum that has opened up in many universities. I wanted my peers to have the opportunity to explore ideas that encourage individual agency and thinking for oneself.

I wanted to offer a choice, because the modern student experience is often little more than a masterclass in group think. In our seminars, the curriculum is heavily weighted toward Marxist critiques and collectivist theories. Classical liberal thought is completely neglected.



Samiksha Bhattacharjee (R) with free speech event guest speaker Connie Shaw

It was only through my own research and engagement with think tanks that I was introduced to the ideas of Friedrich Hayek (Margaret Thatcher's favourite economist) and Thomas Sowell, the American conservative philosopher.

The proof that students are starving for that choice was found at the pub after Connie Shaw's event. Away from the glare of free speech "compliance officers" and activists reading from AI-generated scripts, dozens of students joined us for a pint.

They whispered their support, terrified that a graduate recruiter or a union official might see them. They see the union funding a Gender Expression Fund for beauty products and clothing for transgender people, and they wonder why that same union cannot spare a single word to condemn the sexual harassment of a female speaker.

My university has taught me a painful lesson: that the price of freedom is the loss of belonging and popularity. As long as the alternative is a moral wasteland of conformity and fear, that's a price I'm willing to pay.



Scan here to read Samiksha's piece directly in The Telegraph

SAMIKSHA BHATTACHARJEE

# IN HER OWN WORDS

After publishing her Telegraph article on free speech at UCL, Samiksha Bhattacharjee reflects on the events that led to the piece, the broader culture on campus, and the importance of challenging prevailing narratives.

## What was the argument you wanted to get across in your Telegraph piece?

The piece was based on my own experience at UCL, but it was really about a broader issue across universities. I wanted to show how what happened to me wasn't an isolated incident, but part of a wider cultural shift where free speech is no longer treated as something to be protected. Universities are meant to be places where ideas are tested and debated, but increasingly there's a narrow orthodoxy about what can and cannot be said.

## Why does this issue matter right now?

Universities are the training ground for the next generation. If students are taught that certain ideas cannot be expressed or debated, that doesn't stay on campus — it carries into wider society. What we're seeing now is the result of a culture that prioritizes protecting feelings over allowing open discussion. That has long-term consequences for how we think about freedom of expression more broadly.

## Why should people outside the UK care about this?

What's happening in British universities doesn't stay in Britain. In many ways, the UK is a few years ahead in both cultural and legal shifts around speech. We're already seeing similar pressures emerging in the United States, particularly on campuses. In a globalized world, these trends travel quickly. What happens here can very easily shape what happens elsewhere.

## What was your experience dealing with the university around this event?

The level of bureaucracy was extraordinary. The event went through multiple rounds of risk assessments and restrictions — from being open to the public, to only students, to only members of our society. At each stage, it became more limited. What was most striking, though, was the response afterward. Despite the harassment we faced, the Students' Union issued an apology for the event itself rather than addressing what had happened to us. That response says a lot about the current environment.

## Did Young Voices play a role in helping you develop or place this piece?

Absolutely. They helped shape the article, refine the argument, and get it placed in The Telegraph. Beyond that, they've been incredibly valuable in helping me develop as a writer and communicator — from structuring arguments to preparing for media appearances. That support also led to further opportunities, including appearances on TalkTV and GB News.

## Where do you want to take your media work next?

I want to continue building across multiple platforms. That means writing, traditional media, and also developing my own channels. I run my own platform, Samiksha's State of the Debate, where I explore global issues and culture, and I want to keep growing that alongside more mainstream media work. More broadly, I want to help bring more young voices into these conversations and make these ideas more accessible to a wider audience.

## Where can people follow your work?

You can follow my work through Samiksha's State of the Debate on YouTube and Substack, as well as on social media.

## NEXT-GENERATION NUCLEAR POWER CAN MEET DATA CENTER ENERGY DEMAND—IF REGULATIONS ALLOW IT

IS THIS SMALL MODULAR NUCLEAR POWER'S MOMENT?



### Ed Tarnowski

*Ed Tarnowski has been a Young Voices contributor since 2024 and is a Young Voices 2026 Tech and Innovation Fellow. He writes on energy, technology, and public policy, with a particular focus on how emerging technologies can support economic growth and expand opportunity.*

AI data centers have become flashpoints in public debates over energy costs and grid capacity, leading some politicians to call for heavy restrictions on their operation. Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) is calling for an all-out moratorium.

Advanced nuclear power could provide a solution to these challenges—unless federal regulations get in the way.

Data centers create near-perfect conditions for the burgeoning small modular reactor (SMR) industry: enormous, concentrated energy demand that must be met 24/7. These compact nuclear power plants are designed to deliver steady power at a lower capacity than traditional reactors, so they could be uniquely positioned to meet that demand. Indeed, Meta recently struck 20-year agreements to purchase electricity from three nuclear power plants operated by a single provider, while also joining Oklo and TerraPower in an SMR development project. Google and Kairos Power have plans to deploy an advanced nuclear plant tied to the Tennessee Valley Authority's grid.

Aalo Atomics is a Texas-based startup developing factory-built SMRs designed to operate on or near large energy users—exactly the model that AI infrastructure demands. "We're talking about tens of gigawatts of power in the next five years," Aalo Atomics CEO Matt Loszak told Arena last year. "Each gigawatt is like a whole city! When in history have like 20, 30 cities been created in a matter of five or ten years?"

In addition to meeting data centers' power demands, SMRs could reduce these facilities' environmental footprint. Last year, driven in part by increased data center power usage, U.S. greenhouse gas emissions rose by about 2.4 percent.

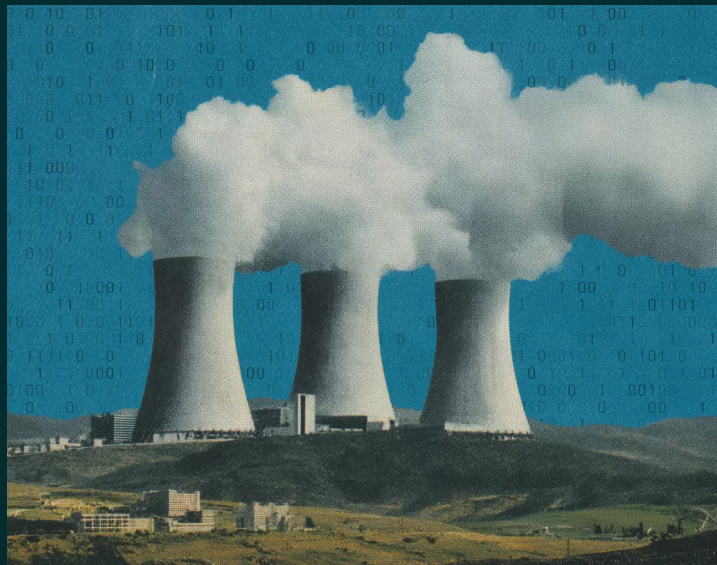
But there are big regulatory barriers. As Loszak pointed out to podcaster Eric Jorgenson, for example, regulators require test data for a new nuclear design license, but obtaining this data is "impossible" without first having that license.

Further, SMRs are subject to a Cold War-era, one-size-fits-all licensing framework. One rule, finalized in 1956, gives the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) the authority to regulate all commercial reactors, which puts SMRs in the same fundamental licensing category as large, grid-scale nuclear plants. This framework was never designed for factory-built, modular reactors, and it contributes to unnecessarily onerous costs and wait times.

Fortunately, the NRC is working to modernize this system. Described by NRC staff as a "risk-informed, technology-inclusive regulatory framework for commercial nuclear plants," 10 CFR Part 53 is a new rule better suited for advanced reactors, including SMR designs. It must be finalized by the end of 2027 but could arrive sooner.

Meanwhile, an ongoing lawsuit is challenging long-standing NRC authority. If successful, it could be a major step in cutting through the red tape that has long burdened America's nuclear energy industry.

That red tape carries real consequences. The Carbon Free Power Project, once expected to be the first U.S. commercial SMR rollout, was announced in 2015. It did not begin undergoing NRC design certification review until 2018. Final certification took effect in 2023, with commercial launch projected for 2029. In the time it took to receive federal approval, projected costs rose sharply—from roughly \$60 to \$90 per megawatt-hour—driven by financing costs, inflation, and schedule risk. As timelines stretched and costs ballooned, participating customers withdrew. The project was canceled the same year it received NRC approval.



Private sector interest in SMRs persists, as demonstrated by Meta's deal with Oklo and TerraPower. But if SMRs are to meet the large-scale energy demand of data centers, major regulatory reform remains necessary.

"Many data center companies have a strong preference for electricity from SMRs, and are even willing to pay a price premium for it, because of the reliable, clean energy SMRs can provide," says Josiah Neeley, an energy analyst at the R Street Institute. "The big question is whether SMRs can be permitted and built on a fast enough time scale to meet that growing demand."



Scan here to read Ed's piece directly in Reason Magazine

ED TARNOWSKI

# IN HIS OWN WORDS

After publishing his article on how nuclear energy can support the growth of AI infrastructure, Ed Tarnowski reflects on the ideas driving his work, the policy challenges ahead, and the role he hopes to play in the broader debate.

## What was the argument you wanted to get across in your piece?

Right now, we're seeing a surge in demand for AI data centers, and with that comes real concern about energy use and grid capacity. My argument was that we don't need to restrict innovation to deal with that. We already have a solution. Small modular reactors are uniquely suited to meet this demand. They provide reliable, clean energy and can be deployed directly on-site, allowing data centers to operate independently of the grid. That means we can continue expanding AI infrastructure without driving up costs or creating environmental trade-offs.

## Why does this issue matter right now?

AI is becoming one of the defining technologies of our time, and the infrastructure behind it is under increasing scrutiny. If we get the policy response wrong, we risk slowing down innovation at a critical moment.

What stood out to me is how simple the solution actually is. We're not talking about speculative technology. This is something that exists today, but is being held back by outdated regulations.

## Why do you think this issue resonates with young people?

Young people are at the forefront of the AI shift. They're the fastest to adopt it, the most fluent in it, and the most aware of its potential. At the same time, I think there's been a real shift in how Gen Z views nuclear energy. For a long time, it was associated with risk and fear. Now, there's a much more rational view. It's seen as clean, reliable, and efficient. When you combine that with the growth of AI, it becomes a very intuitive solution.

## Did Young Voices play a role in helping you develop or place this piece?

Yes — especially through the Tech and Innovation Fellowship. That gave me the opportunity to speak directly with experts in the field and deepen my understanding of next-generation nuclear. It helped me sharpen parts of the argument where I wanted more technical grounding. It's something I was already interested in, but having access to those conversations made a big difference in how I approached the piece.

## Where do you want to take your writing and media work next?

I want to continue focusing on tech and innovation — that's my main beat — but also connect it more directly to human rights. One area I'm particularly interested in is satellite internet, like Starlink. In places like Iran, where governments shut down internet access, these technologies can be a lifeline. I've seen it described as a "tyrant's worst nightmare," and I think that's exactly right. That intersection between technology and freedom is something I want to explore much more.

## What kind of work do you hope to be doing in the next five years?

I want to keep building in media — both writing and on-air. Writing will always be central, but I'm increasingly interested in doing more interviews, podcasts, and broadcast work. Becoming a regular voice in those spaces is a big goal. Young Voices has played a major role in that already — helping me build relationships with editors, refine my pitching, and develop my media skills more broadly.

## Where can people follow your work?

You can find me on X at @EdTarnowski, where I write about tech, energy, and policy.

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

## NOT ONE OF MY PROFESSORS HAS SAID CHARLIE KIRK'S NAME

CAMPUS REACTIONS TO THE CHARLIE KIRK ASSASSINATION



### Rachel Chiu

*Rachel Chiu has been a Young Voices contributor since 2021. She is a law student at Yale Law School, writing on political and legal issues, with a focus on campus discourse, free expression, and the role of institutions in shaping public debate.*

I hoped my instructors would speak out against political violence after the shooting, but not one has mentioned Charlie Kirk's name. At Yale Law School, there is a deep institutional memory about the consequences of ideological divisiveness. Here, anticonservative hostility once escalated so high that political events were shut down by protests, and judges felt it necessary to stop hiring Yale clerks.

Professors are abdicating their responsibility to protect intellectual diversity when they ignore a political murder on another campus. This is the type of complacency that Kirk challenged at his events. He never shied away from hard questions and pressed those who merely parroted the words they heard in the classroom.

Professors too often choose to be scholars first and leaders second. They are trained to view the world through an abstract and theoretical perspective. But when faced with reality—such as conservative students ostracized in class discussions and excluded from academic opportunities—they look the other way. Silence is construed as permission. That's why many students feel it is acceptable to target their conservative peers and take extreme measures to quash opposing viewpoints.

While I'm not dissuaded from political assembly, I am discouraged by the indifference to Kirk's jarring assassination. As this has shown, the political climate on college campuses is worse than we thought.



Scan here to read Rachel's piece directly in The Wall Street Journal

RACHEL CHIU

# IN HER OWN WORDS

After publishing her Wall Street Journal article on the aftermath of the Charlie Kirk assassination, Rachel Chiu reflects on the lack of response on campus, the impact on students, and the role of young voices in shaping the conversation.

## What was the argument you wanted to get across in your Wall Street Journal piece?

I wrote the piece shortly after the Charlie Kirk assassination, and what struck me most was the silence that followed on campus. When major political events happen, especially ones people disagree with, there's usually a strong response from professors and students. But in this case, there was almost nothing. That asymmetry felt important to highlight.

It created the impression that violence against people you disagree with is somehow less serious — and that's a dangerous message.

## Why did this issue matter to you personally?

I first heard the news while I was at school, and I expected there to be some kind of response — especially because it happened on a college campus. What surprised me was how little was said. Not one professor brought it up, and many students stayed quiet as well. That disconnect made me feel like it was something that needed to be addressed.

## Why is it important for younger voices to speak on this issue?

If young people don't speak about what's happening on their own campuses, that perspective gets lost. This was an issue that directly affected students — not just politically, but in terms of how safe people felt expressing their views. I spoke to someone who was at the event, and the fear didn't end when it was over. Those experiences need to be shared. Otherwise, people underestimate the real impact these moments have.

## Did Young Voices play a role in helping you develop or place this piece?

Yes — I reached out to the team as soon as I knew I wanted to write about it. They helped me move quickly, which really mattered given how fast the news cycle moves. They also worked with me on shaping the piece for a shorter format and getting it placed while the issue was still being actively discussed. I don't think I could have done that on my own at that speed.

## What kind of response did you see after it was published?

A lot of students reached out to me afterwards, especially at my law school. Many of them said they felt the same way — that the silence around the issue was strange — but hadn't felt comfortable saying it themselves. Those responses meant the most to me. When people see their perspective reflected somewhere, it gives them more confidence to speak up as well.

## Where do you want to take your writing and media work next?

I'm graduating from law school this year, and I definitely want to continue writing. Young Voices has been a big part of that journey — it helped me realize how important it is not just to learn ideas, but to communicate them. Going forward, I'm excited to focus on issues at the intersection of law and policy and bring my legal training into my writing.

## Where can people follow your work?

You can follow me on X at @RachelHChiu, where I share my writing and upcoming work.



# BROOKLYN CHARTER SCHOOL GRADUATE ADDRESSES MAMDANI'S OPPOSITION TO THE GIFTED AND TALENTED PROGRAM



## Daniel Idfresne

Daniel Idfresne has been a Young Voices contributor since 2024. He is a student at Syracuse University, writing on education policy and political issues, drawing on his own experience to explore school choice, opportunity, and pathways to upward mobility.

Appearing on Fox & Friends, Daniel Idfresne brought a personal perspective to the debate over education reform in New York City.

As a beneficiary of charter schools, he argued that limiting their growth would undermine one of the city's most effective tools for expanding opportunity.

Scan the QR code to watch Daniel's full Fox & Friends appearance.



DANIEL IDFRESNE

# IN HIS OWN WORDS

After appearing on Fox & Friends to discuss the future of education in New York City, Daniel Idfresne reflects on the role of school choice, his own experience growing up in the system, and where he plans to take his work next.

## What was the argument you wanted to get across in your Fox & Friends appearance?

The segment was part of a broader set of pieces I was working on around the New York City elections, where education is one of the most important local issues. My argument was that policies being proposed by progressives — particularly around charter schools — risk undermining one of the most effective pathways for social mobility in the city. Charter schools have given thousands of students, especially from lower-income backgrounds, access to better education options. Limiting their growth would take that opportunity away.

## Why does this issue matter to you personally?

I'm a product of that system. I attended a charter school from first through eighth grade, and then a specialized high school. School choice is a big reason I'm where I am today. It gave me access to a better education and ultimately more opportunities. So this isn't abstract for me. When I talk about charter schools working, I'm talking about something I've lived.

## Why is it important for younger voices to speak on this issue?

Charter schools are still a relatively recent phenomenon, which means we're now seeing the first generations of students come through the system and succeed. People like me have a responsibility to speak up. Data is important, but it's not enough on its own. You need the human element — people who can say, "This worked for me. This changed my life." That's how you make the issue real.

## Did Young Voices play a role in helping you get to this point?

Definitely. At this stage, we've developed a really strong workflow. I know what a clean draft looks like, and the team helps refine it and get it placed. On the media side, they're pitching to producers and creating those opportunities. Most importantly, our workflow is the result of two years of development — learning how to structure arguments, write more clearly, and communicate effectively across different formats. That's been a huge part of my growth.

## What do you want to do next in your media career?

I'm graduating this year, and joining the Boston Globe as an opinion journalism Fellow -- an opportunity that combines traditional reporting instincts with cross-platform commentary!

## Where can people follow your work?

You can find me on X, Instagram and TikTok at @danielidfresne, where I break down my writing and cover current issues. I'm also working on launching a newsletter soon.

# SUPPORT THE NEXT GENERATION OF FREEDOM'S VOICES

[joinyv.org](http://joinyv.org)  
[info@joinyv.org](mailto:info@joinyv.org)

Registered 501(c)(3)  
EIN: 81-2593815

**Young Voices**  
1 Thomas Circle NW, Suite 700  
Washington, DC 20005