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MESA Board Statement Regarding 2010 Meeting Location

Questions concerning the choice of hotel for the 2010 MESA Conference in San Diego have confronted the Board of Directors, charged as it is with fiduciary responsibility for the Association, with a series of issues concerning situations that may arise as a result of decisions that are made by others.

In the specific case regarding the San Diego hotel and the fact that its owner, Douglas Manchester, donated \$125,000 to Proposition 8 which succeeded in overturning previously adjudicated decisions concerning gay marriage, several academic associations have debated whether or not to cancel their meetings at the hotel, in each case risking forfeit of the contracted financial obligation. In MESA's case, that amount was originally \$98,000, and it has since increased to some \$300,000. Unite Here, a union that represents hotel workers in various North American cities but does not and is not actively seeking to represent employees at the Manchester Grand Hyatt, has implied that the hotel employees are treated unfairly, but it has offered no evidence to support that claim other than an allusion to 2006 lunch-hour protests by non-union housekeepers, a dispute that to the best of our knowledge has been settled.

With this in mind, MESA's Board of Directors decided to circulate a questionnaire to the entire membership. There was an extremely large response. Of those who did respond, fully 71% indicated that they would attend the meeting at the hotel. Many respondents also expressed the opinion that MESA should adhere to its mission of fostering the study of the Middle East and that the Board of Directors should exercise due financial responsibility with regard to the association's finances. Many respondents also suggested that, in any case, it would be impossible for the Association to reflect the diverse views of its entire membership with regard to a whole host of political and social issues.



In this context, it is important to note that prudent management of the Association's finances requires that the hotels to be used for the annual conferences of our increasingly large organization need to be reserved (and financial obligations made) many years in advance of the meeting itself. Clearly it is not possible for anyone to predict what issues may arise in any particular location—state, city, or hotel—right up to the actual date of the conference itself.

With all these factors in mind, it is the policy of MESA's Board of Directors not to take positions on issues of political or social concern. That said, it remains, needless to say, the right of every individual member of our Association to make their own judgment in the light of any circumstances that may arise in connection with a particular site or hotel and to come to whatever conclusions they see fit.