

Tuesday, December 8, 2009

Dear President Hockfield,

It was great speaking with you at the Winter Break event in Stata.

We are disturbed by the recent unethical firings from the Hyatt Regency Cambridge next to Tang Hall, from the Hyatt Regency Boston, and from the Hyatt Harborside at Logan International Airport. We are writing to you because we think that it's important for the MIT community to join Governor Patrick, Representative Capuano, the faculty of Emerson College, and numerous other businesses, politicians, and groups in boycotting these Hyatts until the workers are re-hired.

We object to these firings because of the unethical and disrespectful treatment of these fired workers, many of whom are immigrant women. The hotels have replaced 98 housekeepers, originally paid \$14-16/hour with health benefits, with lower-paid temporary workers, paid \$8/hour with no health benefits. Though some of these workers had been with Hyatt for over twenty years, they were given no advance notice that they were to be fired. In fact, the housekeepers claim that they were asked to train their replacement workers under the pretense that the replacements would fill in when they were sick or on vacation. Hyatt has claimed that the layoffs were made due to "unprecedented economic challenges" faced by the hotel. However, The Wall Street Journal stated in a November 2 article that Hyatt has a "strong balance sheet," and just last month they were able to raise nearly \$1 billion dollars by an initial public stock offering.

We are writing now because the hotel has done little to remedy the situation in the past three months and nearly all of the fired housekeepers are still out of work. In response to the bad press, the hotel chain offered to employ the housekeepers at a staffing agency at their current rate of pay through the end of 2010, after which they would likely only be able to find jobs for the kind of temporary agency that displaced them. "We will not accept temp positions that are designed to put others out of work," said fired housekeeper Lucine Williams, who worked for Hyatt for almost 22 years, in the Boston Globe. Only six of the ninety-eight fired workers accepted the Hyatt's proposal.

MIT is in a unique position to influence this situation because of its extensive business with the Hyatt Regency Cambridge. MIT hosts both visitors and conferences at the Hyatt: conferences with guests staying at the Hyatt include the Alumni Leadership conference in September, the System Design and Management and iGEM conferences in October, and the MIT Research and Development Conference in November, described on its website as a "flagship MIT conference." The location of the Hyatt is indicated on printed campus maps. Guests and visitors to the MIT campus often stay at the Hyatt. Parents of members of the senior class may soon consider making room reservations at the Hyatt in preparation for graduation. MIT should not include the Hyatt on lists of suggested accommodations for guests, as doing so reflects poorly on MIT's reputation as a host and places our guests in an uncomfortable position.

We urge MIT to take the following immediate steps in response to the Hyatt layoffs:

1. Do not renew MIT's hotel services partnership agreement with the Hyatt, scheduled to expire on December 31, 2009, until the workers are re-hired. The Hotel Partnership Agreement states: "Whether your stay in Cambridge is for business or pleasure, it should be a worry-free experience..." The hotel partnership agreement places MIT under the following obligations: "Hyatt Regency Cambridge to be designated as a 'Preferred Hotel Vendor' for MIT and communicated as such throughout The Institute... MIT Office of Procurement to encourage consideration of Hyatt Regency Cambridge... Hyatt Regency Cambridge to receive prominent placement on the MIT Procurement and Travel web sites..." We believe that it is currently inappropriate for MIT to continue these obligations to the Hyatt.
2. Remove the Hyatt from lists of suggested accommodations for visitors to campus.
3. Send an email to the entire campus community to inform us of what happened at the Hyatts so that each member of the MIT community can individually and personally make an informed decision on how she or he wishes to respond to this incident.

Sincerely,
Rachel Sealfon and Jean Yang
Graduate Students, CSAIL