Opinion

Photo of the Day | Cornhole



Students play cornhole during the Annual Student Health and Wellness Fair at the Student Union Lawn on Wednesday, September 16th, 2026.
PHOTO BY EMMANUEL DEFFOR, GRAB PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

PATRICK'S POLITICS:

Islamophobia destroys the true reality of 9/11



FILE LOGO/THE DAILY CAMPUS

by Patrick Minnerly
OPINION EDITOR
HE/HIM/HIS
Patrick.minnerly@uconn.edu

Zohran Mamdani, the current mayor of New York City, just wanted to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the worst terrorist attack on American soil — the one that had killed nearly 3,000 people in the city he grew up in and now led. Every previous mayor was able to attend the memorial ceremony peacefully each year, but Mamdani faced over 100,000 signatures that demanded he not show up. To those who signed the petition, Mamdani is no ordinary mayor because he is Muslim. Their blatant Islamophobia is abhorrent, but it also obscures the legacy of 9/11 and what the tragedy should mean for our understanding of America. 25 years later, we should be focused on supporting those who were affected, not more hate.

The specter of Islamophobia has followed Muslims in America since well before 9/11, and the gravity of 9/11 transformed that hate into a firestorm. The terrorist organization Al-Qaeda, which holds extremist religious beliefs, was responsible for the attacks. Al-Qaeda belonging to an extreme sect of Islam opened the door for Islamophobia to enter further into the mainstream; hate crimes against Muslims spiked in 2001 and have never recovered to pre-9/11 levels.

In the years after 9/11, even as Muslim representation has grown, Islamophobia in our society has only become more prevalent. On the right, anti-Muslim sentiment has been normalized as part of a larger fear-based platform. After Abdul El-Sayed, the Democratic candidate for senator in Michigan, won his primary, prominent Republicans went after him as a "terrorist" and "jihadist." This disgusting language has become so mainstream that there weren't any consequences.

While anti-Muslim rhetoric has taken hold in many corners of the country, the reality of post-9/11 struggles continues to be relatively ignored. At this point, more people have died from 9/11-related health issues than during the attacks themselves.

Mamdani recently released around 170,000 documents to the public that detailed the horrific air quality in Lower Manhattan after the attacks. The air quality remained at intensely dangerous levels for several months, and many people, especially first responders, continued working amid toxic dust particles. These documents, hidden by the city for 25 years, underscore the extremely dangerous conditions that first responders faced both during and after the collapse of the Twin Towers. They also speak to the lack of attention paid to these first responders and the inhabitants of the city once the immediate aftermath was over.

For years after the attacks, struggling first responders kept trying to secure funding that would assist with their health issues. At the center of the fight was the World Trade Center Health Program, which has continually faced staffing and funding issues since its establishment in 2010. In 2019, comedian and activist Jon Stewart memorably spoke out against Congress's inaction on the issue, reminding them that the official FDNY response time was "five seconds" and that more first responders would continue to get sick and die while Congress refused to do their job. Seven years after that call to action, in February of 2026, Congress finally passed a bill that included a solution to the funding problem. Seven years later, and 25 years after 9/11 ended thousands of people's lives and irreparably affected thousands more. How could our leaders ignore this crisis and put it on the back burner for so long?

The answer is that real, accountable governance is more difficult than spreading hate and bigotry. It took 25 years for first responders to secure long-term health coverage because representatives and senators in Congress had to be convinced, over and over again, that the funding was necessary and high priority. They had to shore up votes and work for the people, which is a lot harder than posting on social media that a candidate for public office is a "TERRORIST" because they're Muslim.

This is the legacy of 9/11 that the country must reckon with. Caring for the first responders who heroically went into Ground Zero and witnessed many of their colleagues' deaths should have been the first priority. Instead, even today, the goal of many of our leaders is to spread division. Their version of "Never Forget" means they can never let go of hate.

Mamdani was able to shake off the right-wing disapproval and still attended this year's ceremony at Ground Zero. Among the outraged was disgraced former mayor Rudy Giuliani, who was in power during 9/11 and said recently that "it offends me that he's [Mamdani] coming." Mamdani still shook his hand at the ceremony, emphasizing an attempt at shared understanding of the tragedy over division and hatefulness.

Mamdani's example, and the plight of first responders then and now, should be a wake-up call. Government is far more productive when it's focused on helping the people, not dividing them through hateful rhetoric. It may seem like an obvious truth, but in this age where sowing discord is popular, it's important to remember. Like 9/11, it's something we should never, ever forget.

WHAT THEY DON'T TELL YOU ABOUT BEING TRANSGENDER

by PJ Bekkali
CONTRIBUTOR
HE/HIM/THEY
nab23004@uconn.edu

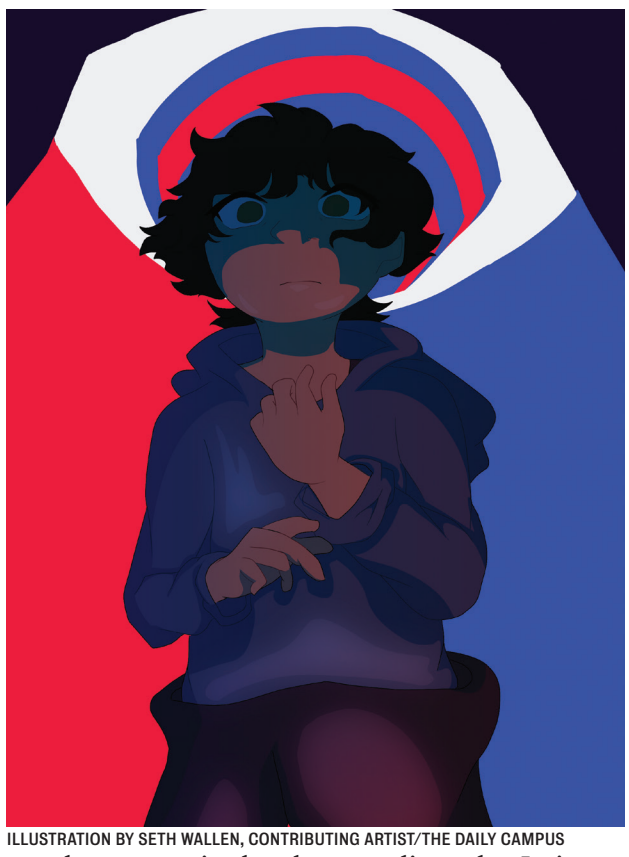


ILLUSTRATION BY SETH WALLEN, CONTRIBUTING ARTIST/THE DAILY CAMPUS

You're going to look bad at first. Your sense of taste is being reshaped at breakneck speed. All of the weird phases that other people were allowed to have in middle school are going to happen all at once. You're going to go through puberty again and deal with the acne, the voice cracks and the fat redistribution. Growing and shrinking pains. Your clothes will stop fitting. You will have to buy more or learn how to sew. It's very expensive to look like a different person.

Although you may feel like a different person, you cannot leave your old troubles and traumas behind. That new name cannot rewrite who you are. There is no hard start or end date to your transition. You could celebrate milestones like your renaming, first hormones or getting gendered correctly. But it all blends together and slowly feels like coming home.

You're going to have complicated feelings about your body. Especially the things you have already been made fun of for, like your body hair or the size of your hands or feet. You will look at your body through new eyes and new things are scary. Your body is not monstrous; it is different and new.

You will remember each and every interaction you have with strangers. And it's not their fault. Sometimes. They haven't experienced someone like you before and they may never again. Because you are unique in a way that you have never asked to be.

You will be stared at. Often. Existing in public will get you trapped in the infinite conversational loop of "Sir-ma'am-. . ?" by strangers. You will wonder if other people are perceived and labeled as often as you are. They are not.

You may want to disappear under the weight of their stares. Do not. You need to live, and there are people who count on you. Some of those strangers are people like you. They need to see that there is more.

Being transgender is terrifying. It feels like your insides are on display. Not to mention the physical danger you are in. It is a pressure unlike any other. You will scrutinize all of your body parts and habits as too masculine or too feminine. You will rebuild yourself constantly. It will never end. Find joy in the process. It's the only way to cope.

You will quickly discover that it takes so much work to feel like yourself after a lifetime of feeling wrong. You will learn new skills and gain new hobbies. Makeup is hard. Everything is hard. You will need to lean on your genderpeers for help.

You will bridge the gap between people. You grew up speaking fluent "boy" or "girl" and you will be expected to translate for the monolinguals. It is exhausting. You will relearn how to speak. The remnants of your old self will blend with w your new self.

Your voice is a beautiful and blurry mosaic of your past, present and future. Don't be embarrassed to be heard. Speak up. Your voice will vibrate in a different spot and it will tickle or hurt or both. Your voice is an instrument that you've been playing with your non-dominant hand. It will take time and patience to relearn it.

You will need to develop thicker skin. The truth hurts. Strangers are mean. Your real friends are honest, sometimes too honest. Make sure to take a break from being scrutinized. Find people like you.

Being transgender is a lonely existence and company is a necessary break. Be gentle with yourself, because you will make so many mistakes. Let go of your anger at missing out on so much. You will never get the time back, but all you can do is commit to living as yourself now. Good luck on your journey; I'm here with you.