

May, 26, 2020

Leo Thuman's Testimony in favor of Sub. S.B. No. 40 – FORUM Act

House Higher Education Committee

Columbus, OH

Position: In Favor

Dear Chairwoman Keller, Vice Chairman Riedel, and esteemed members of the Higher Education Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony in support of S.B 40 – The Forum Act. Please accept this letter on my own behalf.

I am a student at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, seeking a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science. I am also involved on campus, currently serving as Policy Chairman of the Case College Republicans, and I have been involved with the founding of an organization tentatively named 'Case Students for Life.'

I am interested in this timely piece of legislation being passed into law because, as a college student in the state of Ohio, I am quite aware of the importance of the protection of intellectual, artistic, and religious speech on campus. I am also aware that there sometimes exists a temptation for university and college administrations to oppose or stifle student or faculty speech when it is unpopular with a body as a whole, controversial in the public sphere, or runs counter to the institution's promoted principles. Fortunately, my experience hasn't been so bad, but I have been noticing the campus climate worsening, and serious pressure mounting from particular interests to stifle speech of all sorts which they find offensive.

For administrations to stifle speech and restrict its place on campus unduly, whether as acquiescence to a vocal group of so-called "woke" students behaving like a mass of little tyrants, or of its own volition, is unacceptable. Such repression of campus speech runs counter to Ohio values, the values of its constitution, and the values of the American Founding.

Universities and colleges were once looked upon as guardians of the Republic's future, providing a space for enlightened discussion and free discourse for growing young people. Sadly though, now a toxic idea that certain speech is 'unprotected' or 'illegitimate' has grown more popular in our institutions. This idea of 'illegitimate' speech does not take issue with physical threats, obscenity, or disturbing the peace. Indeed, even the founders and earliest American jurists recognized that these could pose issues on occasions. Rather, this is an idea that certain speech, such as speech defending the right to life of the

unborn, should be restrained or confined to certain spaces, certain times, and certain words because a majority (or vocal minority) may find it disagreeable.

SB 40 promises to protect the rights of students like myself on college campuses. This legislation steers colleges away from abdicating the crucial responsibility they hold to the public through rule of law. Consequently, it demands that they act as laboratories of democracy, where students and faculty may freely express intellectual opinions on political and academic matters in the pursuit of truth. Therefore, this legislation has my strongest support.

Best Regards,

Leo Thuman