

Thank you Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member and to all the distinguished members of the committee. My name is Travis Irvine and I am a former Libertarian candidate for Governor of Ohio. On behalf of myself, the Libertarian Party of Ohio and nearly 80,000 Ohioans who voted for me in the 2018 election, I'm proud to stand with a multi-partisan alliance and submit my testimony in opposition to HB 151, which will only add more layers of unnecessary bureaucracy to the already burdensome educational process surrounding Ohio's universities, campuses and the economies that stem from these distinguished institutions. I will let the educational experts and my fellow opponents espouse more about why HB 151 does irreparable harm to the various aspects of our state's higher educational systems that it purports to fix, but my main concern is that HB 151 is a series of contradictions that claims to promote "intellectual diversity" while simultaneously attempting to legislate the content and manner in which certain topics can be addressed. This would have a chilling effect on true academic freedom and make it more difficult for Ohio's colleges and universities to attract students and faculty of *all* political stripes going forward.

I've watched some of the testimonies in support of HB 151 from various "conservative" students as well as its sponsors who have claimed that passage of this bill will somehow "help" maintain academic freedom, but in truth, students already have those freedoms and are now asking the government to "save" them in what should be their own academic journeys. For years, college Republicans and "conservatives" have decried how they've been "persecuted" by the "liberal" cultures on campuses across America, while simultaneously claiming that "liberal" students are all "snowflakes" pushing "cancel culture" and giving in to "trigger warnings." And yet, here we are with some Ohio Republicans claiming that their feelings are "hurt" because of "bias" in their classrooms, which can only be stopped with the help of HB 151 and big government. To illustrate the absolute ridiculousness of these unfounded claims, I'd like to share my own college experiences that led me to become the Libertarian candidate for governor of Ohio in 2018.

I graduated from the public school system in Bexley, one of 26 valedictorians with a 4.0 GPA in 2002 before attending Ohio University in the liberal bastion of Athens, Ohio — OU, oh yeah! There I began voting in some of my first statewide elections for a variety of candidates from all parties, including former Republican state legislator Jimmy Stewart, only because he was nice enough to talk to me outside of the Convocation Center on West Green on Election Day. But as Republicans at the federal level began to wage the war in Iraq in 2003, I found myself leaning more towards Democratic candidates in the years to come, even campaigning for John Kerry in 2004 and pushing for change in the country as the "Blue Wave" swept over Ohio and most of America in 2006. That being said, by 2007 I was already becoming disillusioned with the Democrats' claims of trying to end the conflict in Iraq, so when I heard a Texas congressman named Ron Paul speak out against the Iraq War in a Republican presidential debate that year, I wanted to learn more about where he was on the political spectrum. It was because of him and my fellow friends who were disenfranchised with the two-party system that I found the Libertarians.

At no point in my entire undergrad education did I ever question if any of my professors or OU administrators were trying to lead me towards one political ideology or another, or sway my beliefs to match their own personal political persuasions. In fact, I left OU more equipped than ever to make my *own* political decisions and frankly, to decide whether either or *neither* of the two major political parties were right for me or worth an ounce of my time. I later ran for Mayor of Bexley with the endorsements of both the Franklin County Libertarian Party and the Central Ohio Green Party before heading to D.C. to intern with Democratic Senator Chuck Schumer of New York. I then returned to Ohio to run for the U.S. Congress as a Libertarian in what was then Ohio's 12th congressional district. After that experience, I

made the decision to apply to grad school, but not just any grad school — I had my sites set on one of the most esteemed journalism schools in the country: Columbia University’s School of Journalism.

Sure enough, in 2011 I was admitted and while I was the “token Libertarian” attending what is largely referred to as an “uber liberal” journalism school in the “uber liberal” city of New York, I never once felt threatened or like my point of view was being disenfranchised. In fact, I’d like to highlight one of my favorite professors I had at Columbia or ever — a distinguished professor who was both a literary legend and a journalism giant who just passed away earlier this year at 90-years-old — a man named Victor Navasky. Victor was a self-described “Communist” and when he was first hired by the school to run the Columbia Journalism Review, he was attacked by — you guessed it, “conservatives” — because they thought he’d bring his own biases to the institution. To the contrary, Mr. Navasky was one of the best, fairest and funniest professors I’ve ever had, no matter how much we may have disagreed politically. He often made sure that I was attending the esteemed magazine lectures he would organize, because he pointed out that I was one of the only students “who would ask questions.” Never once did I feel like Mr. Navasky was cutting me short because of what I believed, nor did I ever think to myself, “Gee, I wish the government would crack down on what I can learn and how I can learn it.” No! Instead, I remain grateful that in both my undergrad and graduate experiences at Ohio *and* Columbia Universities that I got a chance to engage, debate and discuss any political issues of the day or differences with my fellow students — fellow students who until this day remain my friends as alumni, no matter how we may agree or disagree.

With regards to HB 151, what kind of “conservative” would ever want to bring in the heavy hand of the government to help dictate what students can learn from professors or codify what some of their professors could teach them in the name of stopping some kind of “bias?” Why are there Republican “conservatives” on this committee so hellbent on “canceling” what they perceive to be cancel-culture or cracking down on the purported “snowflakes” that they have now become? Did college not come with a big enough “trigger warning” for conservatives who also make fun of liberals for needing it? It’s time to “buck up, buttercup!” Or as a certain former speaker of this body once said, “put your big boy pants on.”

Now I know that the majority of my Democrat friends on this committee are going to be “no” votes on this bill, but I really want to appeal to the real “conservatives” on the Republican side to remind them that HB 151 is just another big government overreach from a supermajority that doesn’t seem to know the difference anymore between helping their own causes and overstepping their bounds. At the end of the day, going to college ain’t kindergarten — Mommy and Daddy aren’t going to hold your hand on your way to school and Ohio’s college students — whether they be conservative, liberal, independent or God help them, Libertarian — don’t need their hands held by the government as they enter this important and *independent* time in their lives. I urge a “**no**” vote on HB 151 to protect true academic, intellectual and educational freedom on Ohio’s university and college campuses alike, or — pending any further notes from the higher educational experts and my fellow opponents of this bill — amending the bill to take out all ambiguous and vague references to educational “bias” and academic “freedom” because indeed, we already have freedom on Ohio’s college campuses today, despite what the sponsors and supporters of this unnecessary legislation think. We don’t need *more* government intervention in these areas, we need less. Let students figure out their *own* way. Thank you again for this opportunity — OU, oh yeah!

Travis Irvine
Former Candidate for Governor
The Libertarian Party of Ohio