

# Petition asks Liberty University to close political think tank

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LYNCHBURG, Va. (RNS)—A petition from a group calling itself Liberty United Against Falkirk is calling for Liberty University to shut down the Falkirk Center, a conservative political think tank at the evangelical Christian school in Lynchburg, Va.

The petition reportedly had been signed by more than 400 Liberty students and recent graduates as of Dec. 29, according to *The Christian Post*.

“Students at Liberty are tired of having our witness tarnished by association with a center that is trying to undo Liberty’s mission,” the petition said.

“We want to be known as people who were given an education to not only enter our desired fields, but also to live as people chosen by the Father, united to the Son and regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit—not as people who were educated to become champions for Trump and Western Civilization in the ‘cultural battlefield.’”

## Center focused on ‘cultural battlefield’

The Falkirk Center was founded last year by then-Liberty University President Jerry Falwell Jr. and Turning Point USA founder Charlie Kirk to equip Christians “to be courageous champions for Christ to advance his kingdom and preserve American freedom,” according to its website.

“Although we do, as Jesus taught, turn the other cheek in our personal relationships, we cannot abdicate our responsibilities on the cultural

battlefield,” it reads.

The petition pushed back on this, saying signers believed Jesus’ words should impact all parts of a Christian’s life and adding, “The mission for the church is not to wage war on the ‘cultural battlefield,’ but to make disciples and to build one another up.”

The petition also expressed concern about a number of the “fellows” associated with the center, calling it a “gateway for many wolves in sheep’s clothing—people who claim Christ’s name because it is convenient for their personal or political gain.”

## **Closely tied to Trump Administration**

It pointed to quotes from several Falkirk fellows defending President Donald Trump and demeaning Democrats, including Christian author and radio host Eric Metaxas, former Trump adviser Sebastian Gorka and current Trump attorney Jenna Ellis.

“Associating any politician or political movement with Christianity bastardizes the gospel of Jesus Christ,” the petition said.

The petition’s signers join a growing chorus of voices that have expressed concerns about Liberty’s association with the Falkirk Center, including student body President Constance Schneider, student body Vice President Joel Thomas, former professor Karen Swallow Prior and historian John Fea.

“When an organization like (the Falkirk Center) is attached to Liberty, it impacts the reputation of not just our school, but our students as well. ... We have had dozens of conversations with students who are embarrassed to claim the name of our school due to the rhetoric that comes from this center,” Schneider tweeted.

Politico also reported earlier this month the center had purchased at least

\$50,000 in campaign-season ads that promoted Trump and other Republican candidates and were designated by Facebook as political.

Scott Lamb, a spokesperson for Liberty University, told Politico, “While any academic think tank will have its detractors, the university and the center have received hundreds of supportive emails.”