

Opening Statement of Rep. Burgess Owens (R-UT), Chairman
Higher Education and Workforce Development Subcommittee
“Public Funds, Private Politics: Examining Bias in the Truman
Scholarship Program”
December 3, 2025

(As prepared for delivery)

The Truman Scholarship was established by Congress in 1975 to honor President Truman’s legacy of public service. The program awards scholarships worth \$30,000 to about 60 college juniors annually who “demonstrate outstanding potential for and who plan to pursue a career in public service.” These funds are to be used for graduate study in an American university in fields such as government, military, or non-profit service. Along with the monetary award, being a Truman Scholar comes with extensive access to mentoring, special programming, and networking opportunities.

A recent American Enterprise Institute report found that most of the Truman Foundation’s work, paid for by taxpayers, are from a fund Congress set up years ago and from a yearly budget allocation. This year’s budget allocation is about \$3 million.

Recent studies, however, have found significant evidence that the Truman Foundation selects liberal students far more often than conservatives.

And while past recipients of the Truman Scholarship include prominent conservatives such as Justice Neil Gorsuch and Congressman Dusty Johnson, today, we'll hear testimony from the College Fix that, in the last 10 years, liberal winners outnumbered conservatives by a 14:1 ratio. We'll also hear testimony from the American Enterprise Institute that not a single winner in the last five years professed interest in causes such as protecting the rights of the unborn or defending the Second Amendment; only three winners mentioned interest in religious liberty. By contrast, the Foundation selected at least 74 winners professing interest in a progressive cause such as "immigration rights," "racial justice and DEI," and "LGBT issues."

This bias is a direct result of who is selecting the winners. On the Regional Review Committees, which interview and select students, liberal-leaning interviewers outnumber conservative-leaning interviewers by a 4:1 ratio.

The officers and board of trustees also lean overwhelmingly left. While a few conservatives, such as the Committee's own Elise Stefanik, serve on the board, they are outnumbered by Democrats. The officers and staff of the Truman Foundation include a former researcher for Vice President Al Gore, a consultant for the Clinton Global Initiative, a staffer for President Obama, and the former CEO of the Roosevelt Institute, a liberal think tank honoring Franklin Roosevelt.

In short, the officers and board, the panel interviewers, and the students they select lean overwhelmingly left, and they do this all with taxpayer funds.

Imagine there was a taxpayer-funded award in which supermajorities of March for Life staffers, NRA staffers, and Heritage Foundation officials could award taxpayer funds to 14 MAGA students for every one Democrat student. If this bias was funded by the American taxpayer the progressive Left would be absolutely irate. And yet, the exact reverse is happening—liberal students win the Truman at 14:1 ratios—and Democrats want to pretend there is no evidence of bias. This is simply unacceptable.

As then-Chairwoman Foxx, Chairman Aderholt, and I wrote in a letter to the Truman Foundation in 2024:

As a publicly funded award charged with preparing the civic leaders of tomorrow, the Truman Scholarship should, at a bare minimum, be reflective of the country's breadth of values, viewpoints, and interests...However, if the Truman Scholarship functions as a career booster solely for students of a particular political persuasion, it should no longer be worthy of Congressional support, taxpayer funding, or its exalted public image.