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Falwell's university: no student Democratic club

by Adelle M. Banks by Religion News Service

Liberty University is drawing criticism for its decision to no longer recognize a Democratic Party student club as an official campus organization.

Jerry Falwell Jr., the president of the university and son of its late founder, said the club has not been disbanded and can continue to meet on campus but will no longer be officially recognized.

"Liberty University is pro-life and believes that marriage between one man and one woman provides the best environment for children," he said in a statement posted Monday (May 25) on the Web site of the Lynchburg, Va., school. "Liberty University will not lend its name or financial support to any student group that advances causes contrary to its mission."

Virginia Gov. Tim Kaine, who is also chairman of the Democratic National Committee, issued a statement criticizing the move.

"Liberty University's decision ... is unfortunate for all parties involved," he said. "I urge the leadership of Liberty University to reverse this attack on the liberty of its students and allow the College Democrats to have the same rights on campus as their counterparts, the College Republicans."

The Rev. Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, sent a letter Wednesday to the IRS seeking a review of the school's tax-exempt status in light of the decision not to recognize the Democratic club.

"As a tax-exempt institution, Liberty is barred from intervening in elections or showing preference for one political party over another," Lynn wrote to the agency.

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