

Student Life Institutional Committee
Minutes from December 13th, 2017
Topic: Turning Point USA Request for Reconsideration

In attendance:

Dean Kittle

Wendy Mohlis

Cassie Hales

LeAnn Faidley

Ryan Pautsch

Sheree Covert

Kunihiko Terasawa

Naomi Alene

Ashlee Henderson

Kittle: Today, the final decision will be made, by myself, about whether to uphold or override the decision that was made by Student Senate to deny Turning Point USA the status of an official organization at Wartburg.

Covert: I think it was good to have a localized version or chapter at Wartburg that is not affiliated with the national organization. I think that is the best option available.

Hales: Were those students not willing to do that?

Kittle: Correct.

Covert: To what I understand, it is because the Student Senate does not see that the national organization represents Wartburg's values.

Kittle: The students who objected, objected for a variety of reason but I think that certainly was one.

Covert: What were some of the other reasons?

Alene: I think that was mostly it. Senators didn't want the affiliation of the National TPUSA organization and Wartburg.

Kittle: I think others maybe thought there would be duplication. Like there is already an active Republican organization on campus and if people wanted to advance these ideas, they could do so. I think, frankly also there were some who just did not trust the students who were bringing this forward. And certainly, they didn't trust that the national representative was very vocal both in the first SRC meeting and answered the questions and she was also there during the full Senate meeting to answer a lot of those questions as well. What caused students discomfort was that even though you have formally put in place in the constitution some barriers, they have informally really put in place a connection to the national organization via this representative there in Wartburg students.

Henderson: I think also another concern may have been that even though the organization was clear that it is legally non-partisan, many of their own posts and those of their supporters

stated that “Conservatives are disappointed”. This didn’t show a sense of neutrality that students expect from something that is called non-partisan.

Kittle: I think in fairness and to be frank, when I met with them, they took things that I had said and massaged them a little bit. But I did express concern that I did feel as though that they misrepresented themselves when they first came to me. I didn’t call them liars but yes, that’s another way of saying it. I said that they misrepresented themselves when they came to me in the fall and said that they would like to have a non-partisan organization to have conversation on campus. I thought, what could be wrong with that, right? So, I had allowed them, which was an exception in our policy to be present at the involvement fair and that’s what they have used against me in this procedure. I feel that there was a bait and switch. I said that to them personally. Then the second thing I said was that if they had just been honest with me, I probably would have made the same decision. Like if they had just said it was a partisan organization that has a political affiliation, that’s fine too. But why are you misrepresenting it.

Alene: I think them saying it is a strategy to separate them from the Republican organization. did this to separate. But is obvious that maybe they don’t support candidates but they do support policies. They do want to have a certain image on campus but even with the professor watch list, they do lean a certain way and I think that is what senators were also concerned about. There was a question that was asked why there were more left leaning professors on the watch list even though they are non-partisan. I think senators, especially those who did some research, were confused by those answers.

Kittle: And the person’s response was that they could also put conservative professors on the watch list.

Alene: I think if they would have just said they support conservative policies but not conservative candidates, they would have come off more trustworthy.

Faidley: Just as a side note, Wartburg is listed on Turning Point as having a chapter.

Kittle: Right, we have talked about that and decided not to make that an issue. Because it doesn’t necessarily mean that there is an official chapter or that they are officially recognized by the college. No one is prevented from having a meeting as students and if they want to say they are a chapter of that, they are not prevented from doing that. They wouldn’t be listed as an official organization on our site. We may get there someday but we are not there today.

Pautsch: Are there other concerns about being tied to the national organization? You said that you felt that they misrepresented themselves and that they are heavily conservative leaning. What are some other specific reasons you or the Senate are uncomfortable?

Kittle: At this point it’s not me, more the Student Senate. Specifically, it’s the tactics in which they have identified themselves like the professor watch list, which I guess is fine. I they want to identify people that they don’t feel like have a reasonable or middle of the road prospective and that they are using power inappropriately to spread that, that’s find. But the tactics of the way they do that is to slander and harass those professors. This is something they talked about

with the students. The students came to me and said that there was a professor on campus that said that “all Trump supporters are racist”. And I said, “Okay, let’s play this out. If we had an organization that was just students and you had come to me and had this claim. I would want to investigate it. Then if you said that you wanted to protest this professor by next Monday, all the students in that class wearing black” I would have been supportive of that. I know that that individual faculty member would have been irritated at me but I would again, support that. The difference is thought, that if those students are doing it as a part of this national organization, the professor now has the organization harassing him or her on social media via social media, email, and at their home. That’s the difference of the strategy.

Pautsch: I did a little research and wanted to know if that was a theme of the organization or an isolated event of just some chapters.

Ashlee: We did discuss this with them. We had the students add in independence clause saying that they would follow Wartburg’s mission statement and they said that they would not engage in the professor watch list because it doesn’t follow Wartburg’s mission statement. It is a fine line for us because they are independent but there still is the affiliation of an organization that does do these things.

Kittle: And that’s why I think, essentially, SRC initially gave its approval because they said they wouldn’t do those things and they would be independent.

Faidley: One of the problems I have with that solution is that the current students understand what that means but when the next students come in, is it laid out clearly that x, y, z are not supported by Wartburg’s mission statement? Will that conversation have to be had with each new group of leadership? Because once the name gets on that national list, it’s on that list and we aren’t getting it removed.

Kittle: I think SRC shared those concerns and tried to get their constitution to address that.

Alene: I think it does, short term, give enough clarification. But when new leadership comes through, it was a concern that they would know why that clause was put there.

Covert: If they bring speakers in, will they have to go through a channel to be approved?

Kittle: If they are a recognized student organization, then no. If they want to use our signage or logo, then yes. Even without being an official organization, they can still invite speakers. But if the college so feels, they could be asked to leave or escorted off the property but that’s a different issue. Because this is a private institution and this is private property, we would be able to do so.

Terasawa: Do the Wartburg TPUSA students have their own page?

Kittle: They have a Facebook page.

Terasawa: Can you explain more about the watch list?

Kittle: If they students think that a professor is more liberal, they pretty much try to embarrass the person.

Alene: The list is not on Facebook, I think it is on its own site. I'm pretty sure there's a tab on the national website to it.

Hales: But they can do that on other sites as well. There are all sorts of websites where you can rate your professors.

Kittle: Right, and that was just kind of indicative of the kind of the tactics of the organization.

Henderson: And you can also see those tactics in what has unfolded in the past two weeks.

Hales: Thinking from the conduct side of things, if we are going to hear an appeal, we need new information. We have not heard new information.

Kittle: I agree but they also said that we were bias. They believe the senate voted on their own biases and not on the organization. They believed that if this was a liberal organization, that it would have been approved by the Senate. So, I agree about needing new information.

Alene: I talked to a conservative senator who did deny it and that senator said that they voted for what they thought their constituents would want them to vote. That senator voted to deny because they didn't think it was a good representation of the college because of their tactics. Even someone who isn't conservative said the same thing. Senators did keep their biases aside when they voted so I don't know that they have much ground in that claim that we were bias.

Ashlee: And senators that identified their own biases, they abstained for that reason. I think don't know that TPUSA understood it in that way.

Alene: I talked with another senator on who sits on SRC and she said that some of the things the TPUSA student representatives were saying in SRC, wasn't aligning with what they were saying in full Senate, which made senators unsure. I don't think there is much strength in the argument on the ground of Senate being biased.

Covert: Is the reason for the national organization so that they can get funding?

Kittle: Funding, legitimacy, resources, yes.

Faidley: What is the relationship with the national representative? Will she go away once they are approved or will she stay involved?

Covert: Is the representative regional, local?

Alene: Yes, she represents all of the Iowa chapters, I think.

Pautsch: As far as colleges in Iowa, how many chapters are there?

Faidley: There are three including us.

Kittle: Drake had denied about three years, and were sued.

Hales: Are there any other student organizations that are affiliated with national organizations?

Kittle: There are: FCA, Sparkles.

Hales: So, we couldn't even use that.

Kittle: I think they thought that was something we were kind of picking on them about.

Something myself and few of my colleagues have done is to really investigate to see that the student leadership understood understands leadership in the way that aligns with how

Wartburg sees leadership. It is not unprecedented that we investigate these organization with national affiliations.

Alene: SRC has looked into other constitutions with other affiliated organizations like Love Your Melon and FCA. With Love Your Melon, we have asked them to go against the national organization because it required that they only have ~15 members. It is not uncommon for us to amend constitutions in that way.

Hales: Another example, FCA, we allow them on campus but we don't agree with some of their beliefs.

Kittle: Correct, and we went through a quite a struggle to get where we are with that because they had gone a little bit in the direction of things that we were not comfortable with. Also, that all of their events and meetings were run and organized by non-students. So, we removed their two advisors to realign them with the college's mission and had student leaders step forward.

Hales: Could we look to do a similar thing here?

Terasawa: What about Republicans and Democrats, do they have advisors?

Kittle: Yes.

Faidley: This group has a staff member as their advisor.

Kittle: Yes, and he has been in attendance and in my point of view, acted responsibly. He has provided advice and counseled them but has not directed them.

Faidley: He is acting in the way that we treat advisors. The concern is that there is a national advisor that we have no control over and has had more sway.

Hales: I don't know the answer but I am leaning toward what the students want which is a no. That is what they want and I don't feel like I have been provided any new information. If I didn't look at the numbers I would have said yes. It's hard to go against the students' wants.

Alene: If their reason for appealing was because there was a bias, that's just not true. Also, we would not be listening to the students and would be discouraging Student Senate now and in the future.

Faidley: They can always resubmit, right?

Henderson: Yes. I think because we did deny it this year, they can still come back again next year.

Alene: And it would just make sense for them to come back with a new Senate.

Faidley: Right, it wouldn't make sense to come back to the same Senate given the numbers. But if they are claiming a bias Senate, then encourage them to come back to a new Senate next year and to clarify their non-partisanship and what that means and how it will play out. There is no such thing as an unbiased Senate, but we can do our best to but that aside. On the other hand, you also can't prove that bias. It would give them a fresh start by starting new next year, from scratch.

Kittle: Do you mean how they would reimagine having a TPUSA Chapter?

Faidley: I would prefer no, that doesn't seem like a route they want to take because you have offered it to them before. But if they are requesting reconsideration because of a biased Senate, the best option I see is to have them come back next year with a new Senate. You can't prove that the Senate was biased and so you can't overturn the decision for that reason. They can make a new case next year without the ambiguity of the biased question in there.

Covert: Is there a chance of them presenting their own local chapter still this academic year?

Kittle: From where I sit, year. That has been my preference all along. My only concern is that in that suggestion, we would need to sign off on that yearly in the year. I don't want to lead them on with that because what I know now about TPUSA gives me pause.

Alene: I think if they did reapply and got approved, it wouldn't be because the previous Senate was biased but because of the reformulation. The questions that were asked were not politically charged and they would have been asked no matter their political affiliation. With the grounds that the senators have, it wasn't biased. I still don't feel that there is enough evidence to repeal on the stance that the Senate was biased.

Faidley: A suggestion for the student leadership of the organization, that paragraph they ended at the end, it is very vague. It doesn't get specific enough. It says they are not required to participate in all TPUSA events but it does not say they aren't going to. They should state exactly what they are going to get out of the affiliation and what they will not get out of it.

Covert: It does say that they are independent but it also says they are affiliated.

Faidley: They should write out what that means. I think before knowing the votes, it seemed like they addressed the issues. The external advisor is bothersome to me.

Covert: Can our students become members at the other schools?

Alene: Yes, but thought couldn't vote.

Kittle: There was a student who looked to organize a fraternity last year, were told no, sought membership somewhere else and got in.

Covert: Is there a fee to be in this?

Alene: No.

Pautsch: I usually think about it from the other side of the street. I wouldn't want Wartburg to be known as just following with what is an unpopular idea.

Alene: What is the popular idea?

Pautsch: In my view, they can be seen as extreme. The Student Senate said this is something we do not want to be affiliated with. I think, as long as people or organizations are not being violent or harassing people, no matter how maybe ignorant their view is, I think they should still be allowed. As long as they are peaceful.

Alene: It's not their views that are the concern, it's unsure that they would do things peacefully. The only people that really dug into their view were SRC and I don't think their views were the problem. Their tactics made them uncomfortable and unsafe. I wouldn't say faculty or staff are protected.

Pautsch: There are other organizations I don't support but they should have the right to congregate. The problem is if they do get approved and do wrong, can we shut them down? Any one incident of that is not good.

Alene: We have not given the students a chance to prove themselves but the national chapter has done so already. Their mission is to come together and discuss. They can come together and discuss separately.

Pautsch: It was a great idea to suggest they do so separately.

Alene: She should tell them that we trust their mission but is the national organization that we do not support. If we say we don't want a speaker, will that be a new article? If they were separate, there would be less controversy. I think there is a need for that conversation on campus.

Kittle: Right, if they do believe there was political bias, let me force an unbiased conversation. It strikes me, we might be able to advise our students here but it goes back to the brand of those activities that we can't control and could potentially reflect poorly on the college. They can still call themselves a Wartburg chapter but they wouldn't be able to get our funding, use our logo, etc. if we said to them, have a chapter that isn't recognized by the national organization. We don't want to discourage students from gathering. We support that, they can still meet here.

Kittle: What I can't seem to get past is, serving as the Dean of Students, deciding to override an overwhelming vote from the Student Senate and the message that would send.

Faidley: Reiterate that if they had taken up your offer, it would have been different. We have no problem with students gathering to talk about these issues.

Kittle: I will still make that offer when I communicate with them again.