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Welcome To Ohio  
From the desk of Rep. McNally

## Johnson's record worrisome for students at YSU

Congressman Bill Johnson becoming YSU's next President has been a point of contention in the community. Frustration concerning the hiring of a politician, with highly polarizing political views, and absolutely no background in academia, is to be expected even if not unusual.

Increasingly, universities are pursuing this tactic after being tightly squeezed by state funding cuts. Ohio's budget this year included several provisions specifically targeting funding at public higher education institutions. These included changes to the rates on tuition increases and the State Share of Instruction formula.

This isn't the only pressure point public universities in Ohio are facing. The trustees that govern them are appointed by the Governor with advice and consent from the Ohio Senate. The Chair of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, the committee that votes to approve these appointments, requires a [questionnaire](#) that feels like a political litmus test, and uses the word "workforce" more often than the word "student."

This Chair, alongside the Ohio Senate President, convened a [first-ever Trustees summit](#) featuring presentations directing trustees to push back against left-leaning policies and eliminate staff and fields of study, [even if met with resistance](#). He introduced [SB 83](#), widely criticized for its impacts on critical thinking, academic missions, and student success by banning faculty strikes, Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) requirements, and educators' ability to correct factual falsehoods.

Although not a national trend, [educational institutions have become politicized](#) and [targeted in conservative-led states](#), most likely because [college graduates are increasingly voting Democratic](#). That's true to form when Ohio conservatives feel they are losing power. For example, on [the state school board](#), they dismantle the institution and change the rules instead of their unpopular policies.

The pressures from the Statehouse are real. While these hires often inflame passions on campus, [some](#) say they lead to a successful presidency -- if the right person is chosen and the process is seen as fair. That is not the case in the hiring of Johnson.

It's no wonder that [students](#), [staff](#), and [alumni](#) are rightfully questioning the process and the decision. [Enrollment in Ohio colleges dropped by 12% from 2012 to 2022](#). [YSU's own enrollment saw a 12.9% decrease from 2016-2020](#) and, like many regional universities, YSU needs strong enrollment to stay financially viable.

[Great universities](#) are well resourced, attract talent, and provide a great deal of freedom to their staff and students, stimulating learning and innovation. This is crucial for [black](#) and [first-generation](#) college students who are more likely to graduate when feeling a sense of belonging.

In the absence of transparency from the Board, Johnson's [political record](#) is the only publicly available information informing whether he is willing to appreciate and understand academic culture. He can't lie, hide, or change his record, which includes opposing funding education, consumer protections, environmental protections, gun control, humane immigration policies, labor rights and wages, LGBTQ rights, poverty amelioration, racial equality, taxing the wealthy, and women's rights.

Johnson's task is a big one. Amid a public that still sees the benefit of a college education but has grown wary about the politics and culture on college campuses and the value of a four-year degree that has an ever-increasing price tag, he must find a way to create a high-quality student experience. The conventional wisdom: In addition to learning, higher-education institutions must be responsive to a wide range of student wants and needs. If the person in charge has a record of not appreciating the needs of groups of people, for example LGBTQ people in Johnson's case, then how can he possibly provide for them?

Decisions like this leave mothers like me to worry. I want my kids to learn to reason and argue with complexity—to represent their own ideas and values, to use power responsibly and with at least a passing consideration to civic virtue and the public good, while creating opportunities for themselves. This doesn't happen by magic, and it certainly doesn't happen by cramming one-dimensional ideas down their throats. Higher education must rise beyond the close-minded pettiness of partisan thinking of any stripe.

YSU is an anchor for the tri-county area, and higher education in Ohio is at an inflection point. I hope YSU rises to the occasion.

*November 26, 2023, [The Tribune Chronicle Guest Column](#) by Representative Lauren McNally*



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