Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 6, 2011

Chancellor Nicholas Zeppos
Vanderbilt University
211 Kirkland Hall
Nashville, TN 37240

Dear Chancellor Zeppos,

We write to express our deep concern about reports that several religious student groups at Vanderbilt University have been placed on provisional status and face possible dissolution, unless they allow students who do not share the groups' core religious beliefs to obtain leadership positions within the organization.

As Members of Congress dedicated to protecting religious freedom in America, we are troubled to learn that student groups are being prohibited from preserving their religious identity through their student leadership. Religious student groups form around specific beliefs, and provide an opportunity for like-minded individuals to assemble to study the tenets of their faith and engage in activities that enrich their religious experiences. Leaders of student groups necessarily lead student participants in the groups' activities; thus, if a religious student group's activities include Bible study, worship, or prayer, the leader of the group can necessarily be expected to lead in those activities. It follows, then, that religious groups must be allowed to select leaders that share the group's core religious beliefs in order to maintain their religious identities and carry out their primary functions. Selecting leaders that best represent a student organization's mission is not discrimination; it is common sense.

An aspect of American society that greatly contributes to diversity in public discourse is the freedom of like-minded individuals to coalesce around ideals, ensuring that their perspectives are given a voice in the public square. Preventing groups from choosing leaders who best represent the group's mission will dilute public discourse in which groups play such a vital role, and will diminish the diversity on your campus.

We urge you to ensure that Vanderbilt University's nondiscrimination policy is not being interpreted in a manner that discriminates against religious groups. We request that you allow these groups to freely choose student leaders that best represent their core beliefs. We look forward to hearing from you regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

J. Randy Forbes Mike McIntyre

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Jeff Duncan SC-3 | Randy Neugebauer TX-19

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