

Grand Canyon University Heralds Yet Another Victory in Years-Long Battle With Federal Government: ‘Unjust’

Months after the U.S. Department of Education rescinded its historic fine against Grand Canyon University (GCU), a Christian college in Phoenix, Arizona, the school has scored another major victory: a separate lawsuit from the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) was also dropped.

The FTC sued GCU in late 2023, alleging the school deceived students about costs associated with doctoral studies and had engaged in what it saw as illegal telemarketing practices. At the time, the FTC said the “university, its marketer, and its CEO deceptively advertised the cost and course requirements of its doctoral programs and its nonprofit status, and made illegal calls to consumers.”

That lawsuit, which originated just months after the Department of Education levied its own defunct fine, is now officially suspended.

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“The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) voted unanimously [Friday] to dismiss its lawsuit against Grand Canyon University’s largest service provider – Grand Canyon Education – and Brian Mueller, ending years of coordinated lawfare by government officials under the Biden Administration against the largest Christian university in the country,” a GCU statement sent to CBN News read.

All parties have reportedly filed a joint Stipulation of

Dismissal with Prejudice with the court. FTC Chairman Andrew N. Ferguson joined Commissioners Melissa Holyoak and Mark R. Meador in releasing a statement confirming the news.

“This case, which we inherited from the previous administration, was filed nearly two years ago and has suffered losses in two motions to dismiss,” the statement read, going on to note the recent Department of Education victory as well. “In its reduced form, this case presents consumers very little upside relative to the cost of pursuing it to completion.”

Commissioners said recent victories for GCU make it “imprudent to continue expending Commission resources on a lost cause.” Citing a duty to taxpayers, the FTC said it decided to stop pursuing the case. GCU sees this as yet another victory.



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GCU President Brian Mueller also spoke out on the matter in a statement, pushing back on allegations levied against his college and affirming his belief that the lawsuits were part of a “coordinated effort by former officials within the Biden Administration to undermine a thriving Christian university.”

“As we have stated from the beginning, not only were these accusations false, but the opposite is true,” he said. “We go above and beyond what is required in our disclosures and are recognized as a leader in this area.”

Mueller continued, “They threw everything they had at us for four years, and yet, despite every unjust accusation leveled against us, we have not only survived but have continued to thrive as a university. That is a testament, first and foremost, to the strength and dedication of our faculty, staff, students and their families. Above all, it speaks to our unwavering belief that the truth would ultimately

prevail.”

Mueller made similar claims earlier this year, telling CBN News in May he believes the government was unfairly targeting his school. At the time, he was heralding the dismissal of the massive \$37.7 million fine from the Education Department.

At the same time, the Department of Education also confirmed the decision to CBN News and a spokesperson pledged not to “persecute and prosecute colleges and universities based on their religious affiliation,” accusing the previous administration of doing so.

GCU’s years-long battle with the Department of Education caught more media attention than the FTC battle due to the historic size and scope of the fine, with the Biden administration taking what Mueller saw as an aggressive approach.

“This thing all started six years ago, when we reverted to our nonprofit status and it was approved by everybody, and including the [Internal Revenue Service], who has the authority to do it – and the expertise to do it,” he told CBN in May. “And so we tried to work with the [Education] Department because everybody else approved our nonprofit status, which was important for a lot of reasons to the university.”

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GCU’s clash with the government started years ago – and quickly went south when the parties couldn’t come to an understanding. Mueller said GCU ended up filing a complaint when the school wasn’t making progress with the Department of Education, a move he believes sparked more problems for the school.

"Once we filed a complaint, they started retaliation and they opened up five different investigations that literally [have] cost us millions of dollars to defend ourselves," he said. "They looked at thousands, and thousands, and thousands of documents and eventually centered on, 'We think you misled your doctoral students around the time and cost to complete degree.'"

Mueller insisted there was nothing nefarious or misleading going on surrounding the doctoral program and GCU refused to pay the fine.

"Obviously, we're not going to accept that," he said. "Not only did they say we misled them, but they fined us \$37 million, which was the largest fine in the history of the Department of Education. We said that we were not in the mood to negotiate a single penny of that."

Mueller continued, "We wouldn't pay even a dollar, because, not only is it not true, the opposite is true."

He said the Trump administration "took a fresh look" at the fine and the case and decided to drop it, stating the Department of Education now believes there's "absolutely no substantial evidence here that ... GCU misled any students."

"They reversed the decision, which was obviously a huge win for us," Mueller said. "We're not surprised by it. We thought that that would happen, but we're thankful that that happened."

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After that earlier victory, Mueller said the IRS conducted an additional audit of GCU's nonprofit status and found everything to be in order, marking another "major win" for the school. The FTC win seems to have officially closed the long chapter on GCU's clash with the federal government.

When asked if he believes the now-dismissed, massive Education Department fine was motivated by anti-religious or political biases, Mueller responded that he “absolutely” believes it was.

“There is no other substantial reason for the incredible attacks that they’ve levied,” he said, noting GCU has had bipartisan support.

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