

Liberty University's Jerry Falwell Calls for 'Vexit'

Jerry Falwell Jr., president of Liberty University, voiced his support for efforts to allow counties in Virginia unhappy with the state's Democrat-controlled Legislature to join West Virginia.

Standing alongside West Virginia's Gov. Jim Justice in a roomful of whirring robotic factory machinery at Blue Ridge Community and Technical College in Martinsburg, Falwell told reporters that he backs so-called Vexit efforts.

"Many counties (in Virginia) are taking a long, hard look at escaping the barbaric, totalitarian and corrupt Democratic regime that is trampling on individual rights throughout the state," Falwell said.

Last year, Virginia's Democrats, who already controlled the governor's mansion, gained a majority in both houses of the state Legislature. In January, thousands of gun rights advocates flocked to Richmond, the state capital, to brandish firearms and protest potential gun control legislation.

Falwell was quick to acknowledge the legal challenges facing any county trying to redraw the states' borders.

"It's a long shot, no question about it, and it depends on how much grassroots support it receives," Falwell said.

He later added: "It has happened twice before. ... And I don't think it is as much of a long shot as it was for Liberty University to grow from a little small Bible college to the largest Christian university in the world in the last 10 years. I've seen miraculous things happen, and so has Gov. Justice."

(As of 2018, Liberty is no longer the largest Christian university in the world, trailing Grand Canyon University.)

Justice struck a welcoming tone for any entity in Virginia considering joining West Virginia.

“If you are out there, no matter where you may be, Virginia or wherever you may be, as an individual or as a business or whatever, West Virginia is waiting for you with open arms,” the Republican governor said.

Falwell noted that he and Justice’s families are friendly, and explained that his reasons for supporting the measure are rooted in frustrations with Virginia’s Legislature. He accused Democrats of “using their power to strip away the God-given rights” of citizens, describing them as “anti-life, anti-Second Amendment, anti-liberty and even anti-business with their oppressive environmental regulations.”

He singled out a grievance that particularly impacts his school: a recent budget proposal that he said would eliminate student aid for “thousands of online students attending private colleges, while increasing aid for more affluent resident students.” Roughly 2,000 of the students impacted by the proposed legislation, he said, are online students at Liberty.

Liberty’s online education program is widely known to be a significant source of income for the school.

“What they have done at Liberty University is unfathomable,” Justice said.

Counties wishing to leave Virginia would likely need approval from the U.S. Congress and could make their request only after Virginia residents collected sufficient signatures on petitions to press local legislators to put the initiative on the ballot as a referendum.

"We have a rare opportunity to make history in our time," Falwell said, later adding: "I wish Liberty wasn't so big—I'd move it over."

Falwell also said that he plans to campaign for the reelection of both Justice and President Donald Trump.

"President Trump and Gov. Justice are the one-two punch that this state needed, I believe," Falwell said. {eo}

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