George Mason University law school receives largest donation in school's history from estate of far-right judge

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13 April 2019

In early March, George Mason University (GMU), the publicly funded research university based in Fairfax, Virginia, announced that its Antonin Scalia Law School had received a record-breaking donation of $50 million from the estate of the late Judge Allison Rouse and his wife Dorothy Rouse.

Allison Rouse was a conservative judge appointed to the California Court of Appeals under Republican governor Ronald Reagan in 1971. The donation gives permanent endowments to 13 new faculty positions at the law school and will further serve to consolidate its explicitly right-wing character.

"Judge Rouse and Justice Scalia were both appointed to the bench by Ronald Reagan, and Mrs. Rouse was an enthusiastic fan of Justice Scalia," gushed law school dean Henry N. Butler of the donation. "This is a transformational gift that will further strengthen our law school's position among the best in the nation and will provide a strong foundation for our university," GMU president Angel Cabrera added in a law school press release.

The Rouse estate also left the Heritage Foundation, an influential conservative think tank which famously played a role in policy-making during the Reagan administration, a huge bequest of $43 million.

GMU's law school was renamed after the ultra-reactionary Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia following his death in 2016 as a result of an anonymous donation of $20 million. A Freedom of Information Act request revealed the donation came from individuals tied to the conservative Federalist Society, as well as an additional $10 million coming from the Koch Foundation.

With an influx of money from far-right conservative donors, the law school is situating itself as the center of reactionary legal views in American academia. In late March, a GMU student publication reported that the law school had hired President Donald Trump's appointed Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh to teach Constitutional law as a visiting professor. Kavanaugh, a vicious reactionary tied to a slew of attacks on democratic rights and pro-corporate rulings over the past two decades, was appointed to the Supreme Court by the Senate in fall after congressional Democrats' focus on unproven allegations of sexual misconduct against the judge failed to block his confirmation.

Kavanaugh will join Trump's other right-wing Supreme Court pick, Justice Neil Gorsuch, who teaches a visiting course in national security and the separation of powers. Neomi Rao, Trump's administrator for the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, also teaches at the Antonin Scalia School of Law.

GMU has already been revealed to have a longstanding relationship with right-wing figures and groups. Last year, students acting through the UnKoch My Campus activist group sued the university and filed an FOIA request which led to the release of documents, including email exchanges between campus officials and funders, revealing Koch's activities at George Mason.

Documents revealed the role that the Federalist Society played in suggesting legal programs, influencing faculty selection and student admission, rerouting scholarship funds towards the Center for the Study of the Administrative State and the Liberty and Law Center (a think tank overseen by Rao), and even going so far as to re-adjust the Law School's judicial

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clerk program to place students associated with the Federalist Society as clerks to the nation's judges.

In January this year, agreements from 2003-2011 relating to GMU's Mercatus Center were finally made public and revealed that a Koch donation created professorships. School president Cabrera was finally forced to admit that the agreements "grant donors some participation in faculty selection and evaluation."

Last fall, Cabrera announced an investigation into over 300 donor agreements held by the school. In a typical damage control operation meant to whitewash an ongoing and clear violation of the standards of academic freedom, the panel returned a report which didn't find any "egregious practices." Instead, the report cites several dozen "issues that require further action and policy improvements," while failing to clearly state its findings.

GMU's creation of a judicial think tank aimed at formulating right-wing policy is part of broader efforts to incorporate academia into the American ruling elite's efforts to overturn democratic rights and target the world's population for repression.

Also last fall, technology giant Amazon announced it was locating its east coast headquarters, dubbed HQ2, in Northern Virginia just miles from the Pentagon and the US intelligence services, with whom it is seeking an increasingly close relationship.

George Mason, itself one of the most highly militarized universities in the country, unveiled plans for multi-million dollar facilities to be built near the HQ2 in order to "rapidly increase the number of highly skilled graduates for Amazon and other regional employers" in addition to specialized feeder programs for the region's growing cyber security and web technology workforce. The latter sector has been deemed "critical" by officials at the US Department of Defense for "enabling U.S. military dominance and ensuring national security."

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