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Letter, John W. Caldwell to John S. Allen, September 20, 1962

John W. Caldwell

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September 20, 1962

Dr. John S. Allen, President
University of South Florida
Tampa, Florida

Dear Dr. Allen:

As a result of the extended and continued harassment inflicted upon me by the Legislative Investigating Committee, by Senator Charley E. Johns and by members of the committee's staff, I find that I am not at this time either physically or emotionally able to perform my teaching duties. Since my services to the institution are thus impaired, I reluctantly request that, although you have just recently reinstated me, you accept my resignation from the faculty of the University of South Florida.

The brief history of this institution has been indelibly marred by this fruitless investigation which began some six months ago in secret and which has continued in a steady sequence too precise to be coincidental. During this time I have been prominently attacked and vilified in what has been an obvious attempt to destroy me and my career, though for what reason I am still unaware. In submitting herein my resignation, let me address myself briefly to the most damaging of the false charges brought against me.

The first of these is testimony contained in the Johns Committee Report (as printed in The Tribune Aug. 25) concerning an alleged incident of homosexuality reported to me by a student. Senator Johns, in his most recent attack against me (as printed in The Tribune Sept. 19), said "The undeniable fact is that Professor Caldwell has admitted that he failed to take any action to see that an official inquiry was made" into the alleged incident. Yet the Johns Committee report itself states that I reported the matter to the office of the Dean of Student Affairs.

The second false charge, made by Senator Johns Sept. 19, is that "It is a matter of record that when Professor Caldwell appeared before the committee he was suffering from an extreme case of alcoholic hangover and shakes," and that when I was offered a delay in the proceedings I declined, "stating that he was in as good shape as he would be in the next day."

The slanderous implication here is that I was on an extended drunk. The truth of the matter is that I had not been drinking at all. As you know, I suffer from a heart condition which in times of heavy strain causes a shortness of breath, extreme nervousness and unsteadiness. I have witnesses to prove that my condition was not the result of drinking.

The third and most damaging of the charges falsely lodged against me by the Johns Committee concerns a 20-year-old female student. The report, in a viciously contrived implication, suggests that I encouraged the girl to leave her parents, and that I kept her unchaperoned in my home for several days. Many

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pertinent facts given to the committee in my testimony from the report are missing. It is not recorded in the report that partly as a result of my advice the girl decided not to elope with a male student of whom her parents disapproved. It is also not recorded that my wife, my son and my mother-in-law were in my home when the girl was there, or that the girl eventually returned home after staying briefly in the home of a female member of the University faculty. I helped to keep these two young people from running away to get married, yet the committee has twisted my testimony to make it appear that I had committed a grievous sin.

These are but three of the ruthless attempts of the Johns Committee to defame my character. They are indicative of the manner with which the entire investigation was carried out, and they explain the low level of morale to be found among the people who were subjected to this degrading performance. These police state methods have made me and my colleagues almost physically ill, and I cannot tell you the contempt I feel as a result.

I feel that I stood up to be counted as a man when I appealed my suspension and requested a review by my own faculty. I also felt that this might aid the University and the Board of Control in removing management of the educational system from the political arena. However, upon my reinstatement I find that Mr. Johns is going to continue his attacks upon me and I find that I am unable to work in a system where such reckless pursuit of a teacher can take place.

I consulted my attorneys about bringing a libel suit against Mr. Johns, but was informed that such action would be hopeless, since Mr. Johns was speaking as the chairman of a legislative committee and not as a private citizen. Since I am unwilling to suffer such vilification and slander from a source immune from prosecution, I have no choice except to resign from the field of higher education in the State of Florida.

I am a native of this state, and have long loved it and worked in it and for it---often, I hope, to its credit. I leave it sadly, but with the fond hope that the citizens of Florida will again make it possible for their universities to be governed through the Board of Control in a dignified and intelligent manner, free of political interference. Florida's state universities cannot hope to attain greatness under the withering scrutiny of reckless investigations, for no teacher of any stature will be willing to subject himself to such irresponsible attacks.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank and congratulate you, Dr. Allen, your deans and your entire administration for the wholehearted support which you have given me during these trying times. I hope that all of you can now get back to the business of running what promises to be a great University, without further intrusion by Sen. Johns and his committee.

I leave you with an excellent theatre, one of the best theatre arts faculties in the country, and my sincere best wishes for the continued growth, both in quality and quantity, of the University of South Florida.

Sincerely,

/S/ JOHN W. CALDWELL