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**Congress of the United States**  
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HOUSE PERMANENT SELECT  
COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE

May 30, 2025

Board of Governors  
State University System of Florida  
325 West Gaines Street, Suite 1614  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0400

The UF Board of Trustees voted on May 27, 2025, to advance Dr. Santa Ono as the 14<sup>th</sup> president of the University of Florida.<sup>1</sup> Before the trustees convened, I wrote the trustees to underscore the risk that Dr. Ono poses as a candidate for our flagship university's highest academic office.<sup>2</sup>

Many community leaders have recognized the magnitude of this decision, with Senator Rick Scott calling for the trustees to investigate the presidential search process.<sup>3</sup> In a subsequent statement, Chairman Hosseini and Vice Chair Patel were indignant and unresponsive: the Board of Trustees labeled our objections "external voices."<sup>4</sup> The Board of Governors will consider Dr. Ono for approval on June 3, 2025, pursuant to Article IX, Section 7, Florida Constitution; 1001.706(6)(a), Fla. Stat.<sup>5</sup> This letter urges the Board of Governors to exercise their statutory authority to reject Dr. Ono's confirmation and restart the presidential search process immediately.

The University of Florida laid the foundation for my lifelong commitment to public service. Any compromise to our institution's underlying values may splinter this very foundation for future generations of Gators to come. Dr. Ono has argued that his "renewed emphasis on merit" is "rooted in principles" – roots that were allegedly planted by rescinding his own policies at his former university.<sup>6</sup> Chairman Hosseini, without a proven example, pointed to Dr. Ono's op-ed – written this past month – to claim his candidacy is a "decisive break from the progressive orthodoxy [gripping] too many elite campuses." It is unthinkable that "evolving his perspective over time" qualifies Dr. Ono as the absolute best fit for our administration's leadership.

Several revelations were made when the Board of Trustees deliberated earlier this week. Rahul Patel, Chair of the Presidential Search Committee, argued that confidential search procedures yield higher quality applicant pools that include sitting university presidents. Despite the wide use of this practice among research institutions, I remain unconvinced that sacrificing transparency yielded the best possible candidate.

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<sup>1</sup> "UF Board of Trustees selects Dr. Santa J. Ono as the 14<sup>th</sup> president of the University of Florida," News.ufl.edu, May 27, 2025.  
<https://news.ufl.edu/2025/05/ono-selection/>

<sup>2</sup> "Rep. Steube Letter to the University of Florida Board of Trustees," May 21, 2025.  
<https://steube.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/BOTUFLetter.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> "Rick Scott wants UF Board of Trustees, Board of Governors to 'investigate' presidential pick," Florida Politics, May 25, 2025.  
<https://floridapolitics.com/archives/739775-rick-scott-wants-uf-board-of-trustees-board-of-governors-to-investigate-presidential-pick/>

<sup>4</sup> "Taking UF Forward," Statements.ufl.edu, May 22, 2025.  
<https://statements.ufl.edu/statements/2025/may/taking-uf-forward.html>

<sup>5</sup> "Confirmation of University of Florida President-Elect," State University System of Florida, June 3, 2025.  
<https://www.flbog.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Agenda-Item-for-Board-Action-8.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> "Santa Ono: I'm the right choice for UF president. I would make a great school the best," Tallahassee Democrat, May 8, 2025.  
<https://www.tallahassee.com/story/opinion/columns/your-voice/2025/05/08/santa-ono-michigan-florida-president-search/83514382007/>

Further, the Board's deliberations revealed that Dr. Ono's policy pendulum swung only as the legal walls came closing in on radical diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programs. While Dr. Ono referenced prior conversations with administrators at the University of Michigan to dismantle DEI, it wasn't until December 2024 and March 2025 that Dr. Ono formally ended these prejudicial initiatives.<sup>78</sup> Not long before, Mr. Ono has a history of discriminatorily charged comments that would undermine the integrity of the curriculum, before stating that racism is "one of America's original sins." His 2023 inaugural address at the University of Michigan was a snapshot of his vision for "DEI 2.0" and "wrestling with racism and inequity and injustice."<sup>9</sup> I fundamentally doubt that Dr. Ono would not pivot before a different political backdrop in the future.

Together, the Board of Trustees and Dr. Ono have taken the position that his former comments and university policies have been retracted and undone. Dr. Ono stated that he was "not an expert" on the damaging initiatives he long championed, and that it "takes time to understand what is really going on." Yet the consequences of these past decisions are permanent: political expedience cost deserving students and faculty opportunities that may never return. There may exist other opportunities for academic administrators to reconcile regressive campus cultures they once enabled – the University of Florida is *not* one of them.

Before us is a watershed moment for our university. For these reasons, I plead with the Board of Governors to reject Dr. Ono's selection and urge the Board of Trustees to identify a candidate that continues to advance Florida as the leader in intellectual liberty and academic excellence.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "W. Gregory Steube", with a large, stylized "S" at the end.

W. Gregory Steube  
Member of Congress

CC: Governor Ron DeSantis

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<sup>7</sup> "University sets policy on diversity statements," Record.umich.edu, December 5, 2024.

<https://record.umich.edu/articles/university-sets-policy-on-diversity-statements/>

<sup>8</sup> "U-M announces important changes to DEI programs," Record.umich.edu, March 27, 2025.

<https://record.umich.edu/articles/u-m-announces-important-changes-to-dei-programs/>

<sup>9</sup> "Michigan president who called racism America's 'original sin' selected to lead University of Florida," Campus Reform, May 19, 2025.

<https://www.campusreform.org/article/michigan-president-called-racism-americas-original-sin-selected-lead-university-florida/27923>