

**TRANSCRIPT**  
**STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF FLORIDA**  
**BOARD OF GOVERNORS**  
**University of Central Florida**  
**June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2025**  
**Full Board**

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<https://thefloridachannel.org/videos/6-3-25-florida-board-of-governors-meeting/>

(0:00 - 0:46)

**Chair Brian Lamb:**

Okay, I'm going to get us started. We're at the top of the hour. First of all, it's good to see everyone.

Thank you for being here. It's another special meeting, a quite important one, and I'm pretty lucky to have so many of my BOG colleagues present, and I know there are also colleagues that are joining us via Zoom. Before I start, the first thing I've got to say is thank you to President Cartwright and Chair Martins for hosting us on short notice, so thank you for doing that, Alex.

You always are a gracious host, and today's no exception. I also want to acknowledge all of my colleagues that changed their schedules on the BOG to be here. There's a lot going on.

(0:47 - 2:43)

We have a meeting coming up actually in a few weeks, but this was quite important that we make sure that we meet in person. So what the first thing I'm going to do is typically on a board meeting, I'm going to call the meeting to order just to make sure we have a quorum.

If you are on Zoom, please mute your phones. That will make life easier for all of us as we move through the process.

For my colleagues on the board, when we get to a point where we are making a motion or taking any action, if you could just state your name as you take that action, it will make it a lot easier for Rachel and I to keep track of the process. I will ask Rachel to call the roll, and then I'll quickly go into just a few housekeeping items, and then we'll start the meeting of the agenda. Rachel?

(1:37 – 2:26)

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Okay, Chair Lamb?

**Brian Lamb:**

Here.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Governor Levine?

**Alan Levine:**

Here.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Governor Bell Barnett? Governor Bell Barnett?

**Ashley Bell Barnett:**

Here.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Thank you. Governor Cerio?

**Tim Cerio:**

Here.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Governor Dale?

**Carson Dale:**

Here.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Governor Diaz?

**Manny Diaz Jr.:**

Here.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Thank you. Governor Dunn?

**Kimberly Dunn:**

Here.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Governor Edge?

**Aubrey Edge:**

Here.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Governor Frost?

**Patricia Frost:**

Here. Can you hear me?

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Yes, ma'am. Thank you. Governor Good?

**Patricia Frost:**

Thank you.

**Carson Good:**

I'm here.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Governor Haddock?

**Edward Haddock:**

Here.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Governor Jones?

**Ken Jones:**

Here.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Thank you. Okay, perfect. You got logged in. Governor Lydecker?

**Charles Lydecker:**

Here.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Governor Mateer? Governor Mateer? Governor Oliva?

**Jose Oliva:**

Here.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Governor Renner?

**Paul Renner:**

Here.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

And Governor Silagy?

**Eric Silagy:**

Here.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

We have a quorum.

(2:27 – 2:57)

**Brian Lamb:**

Okay. Outstanding. Thank you. I will keep us going. Generally, I would provide a chair's report. I am going to forego doing that because we have a lot of other really important conversation to have, so

I'm going to abbreviate that part of the agenda. I will pause, though, and see if my Chancellor has any comments he would like to make before we move into public comment.

**Chancellor Ray Rodrigues:**

I'll reserve my remarks until our June meeting.

**Brian Lamb:**

Okay, excellent. Rachel, next up, public comment.

(2:58 – 19:23)

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Okay, we have 13 members of the public who wish to offer comment based on the time for time limitations for public comment. Each member of the public will be afforded one minute to offer comment. If Gerard Filitti can please approach. The microphone is right here. And then after Gerard, if Joshua Rubin can get in line to offer comment. Mr. Filitti?

**(Public Commenter 1) Gerard Filitti:**

Thank you so much.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

You have one minute. You may begin.

**(Public Commenter 1) Gerard Filitti:**

My name is Gerard Filitti. I'm a senior counselor at the Lawfare Project in New York, a leading Jewish civil rights organization. I'm also a proud alumnus of the University of Michigan Law School, who works with Jewish students at Michigan, at the University of Florida, and across the country to uphold their civil rights.

I appear before you today to ask that you strongly and unequivocally reject the appointment of Santa Ono. He was tested on anti-Semitism with Michigan, and he failed miserably. Now, this is not about the encampments.

This is not about refusing to listen to Jewish students when their civil rights were being violated. This is about whether or not he understands, and I don't think he does, the consequences of that inaction. We saw this in Boulder, Colorado, on Sunday.

The same rhetoric, the same language going on at Michigan, at schools across America, being used to justify actual violence, firebombing Jews. This is why it's so crucial to act when you're a president of a university. This is not something that can go unnoticed.

This is not something that can go unaddressed. And you can't use as an excuse the fact that some Jewish students may feel so intimidated and bullied that they're afraid to speak up. (Timer chimes)

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Filitti.

**(Public Commenter 1) Gerard Filitti:**

So I urge you to consider the inaction and vote against his appointment.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Thank you. We'll next hear from Joshua Rubin, and then after that, Stephen DeRose. Mr. Rubin, you have one minute for comment.

**(Public Commenter 2) Joshua Rubin:**

Hi, thank you so much for hearing me out.

My name is Josh Rubin. I am a clinical assistant professor at the University of Michigan Medical School in the Department of Learning Health Sciences, but I'm here on my own dime, own time, speaking for myself. I'm here because, one, I want to echo what my colleagues before me said.

I wear this Star of David. I bought this after the horrible reaction on October 9th, and not October 7th, but October 9th. And people tell me all the time that it's brave to wear this on that campus, which is totally absurd that it should be an act of bravery, but that is because of the actions.

However, the point I wanted to make, and there's been a lot of talk, you know, is Dr. Ono secretly a Trojan horse for DEI or something like that, or for wokeness, whatever? I want to go to a different point. Dr. Ono became president...right before he became president, the previous president was terminated because of his own hypocrisy.

The provost was terminated because of his abuse of power. We had enabled committing the largest mass sexual assault and almost accusations against a single individual in U.S. history. (Timer chimes)

His job was to fix that. He failed to fix that. He is a complicit in that culture, and I don't want that here.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Thank you, Mr. Rubin. Thank you. We'll next have Stephen DeRose, and after that, Mike Sanderson. Mr. DeRose, you have one minute.

**(Public Commenter 3) Stephen DeRose:**

A point of inquiry for you. One of the other speakers that has signed up, her name is Wendy Nisan, and she has offered to allot her one minute to me, so if you'd be so kind.

**Brian Lamb:**

That's not how this works. They don't run this meeting. I do. So you have one minute.

**(Public Commenter 3) Stephen DeRose:**

Fine. One minute. My name is Steve DeRose. I'm here to urge you to vote against Santa Ono. Questions must be answered. Did all the search committee members receive a complete dossier on Dr. Ono informing them of his radical past statements before voting to put him forward as the sole finalist? What has Dr. Ono done to earn our trust?

Dr. Ono was Michigan's DEI 2.0 president. UF doesn't need a president who is just now evolving on DEI. UF needs the anti-DEI 2.0 president. The decision before you is bigger than Santa Ono.

If approved, he will control UF through the hiring of key individuals. Currently, there are five unfilled dean positions. Ono will do what he has done in his prior jobs, hire ideologues to do his bidding in shaping Florida's next era of leaders.

You have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to not only select a UF president, but put someone in place that will fill the open billets necessary to take back our flagship university.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Thank you, sir.

**(Public Commenter 3) Stephen DeRose:**

Thank you.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

That's your minute. Thank you. Mr. Mike Sanderson, you have one minute, and then we'll hear from Mr. Rahul Patel. You may begin, Mike.

**(Public Commenter 4) Mike Sanderson:**

Thank you, members of the board. The Board of Governors has an unprecedented situation today where the loudest voice speaking against Santa Ono is a trustee at another university, New College trustee Christopher Rufo.

So let's see how trustee Rufo's university is going. And these results, which are disastrous, larger spending, worse results on admissions, have nothing to do with DEI or anything you might have heard about happening at New College. It's a result of mismanagement, because running a university is hard.

And for the record, I spoke in favor of eliminating DEI at New College in February 2023. These results are a failure of governance, and I tried to look through someone else's perspective. From Christopher Rufo's perspective, Florida presidents have impunity to break laws, to break regulations, to post terrible results, and the trustees will do nothing.

That is, I urge you to fix that system and not to, and recognize that presidents are about management and presidents need experience. Thank you.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Thank you. We'll now hear from Mr. Rahul Patel, and then after that, Mr. Michael Okun. Mr. Patel, you have one minute.

**(Public Commenter 5) Rahul Patel:**

Thank you. My name is Rahul Patel, and I had the honor of serving as chair of the search committee that unanimously selected Dr. Ono as the finalist to be president of the University of Florida.

And I want to be very clear, as chair of the committee, I would have not invited him to meet with the committee or our Board of Trustees unless I was convinced that he was 100% aligned ideologically with the leadership of the state, this board of governors, and our Board of Trustees.

I would also like to call attention to the fact that one thing that has not received a lot of attention in the public is his experience. The fact that someone with this level of experience, global reputation, and ideological alignment with our state has chosen to come here says something about our state.

I have been on the Board of Trustees for 10 years and have led two search committees, and I can tell you that there are not many people out there that have both the ideological alignment with our state and the actual proven ability (Timer chimes) to deliver on our vision to be the best public university in America. Thank you.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Thank you. We'll now hear from Michael Okun. You have one minute.

**(Public Commenter 6) Michael Okun:**

Thank you. I'm a professor at the University of Florida and also the director of the Fixel Institute, and I just want to say to this group that as a member of the Jewish community, I have personal experience with antisemitism, so I know it when I see it. And therefore, I want to state to this group that unequivocally, Dr. Santa Ono is an ally to the Jewish community.

He is non-antisemitic and suggesting otherwise is factually incorrect and deeply harmful. There's also additional proof as the UF Hillel Rabbi Jonah Zinn and his wife and their complete support for

Dr. Ono and Rabbi Davey Rosen at the Hillel in Michigan wrote in a letter last week to say the departure of President Ono is a significant loss for many in our community. However, I'm confident that the University of Florida Jewish community will be exceptionally fortunate to gain a leader so genuinely committed for their safety and well-being.

(10:59 - 14:01)

Ono will bring us to the next level. We need someone that (Timer chimes) will bring this university to the next level. Thank you.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Thank you. We'll now hear from Bob **Stille** and after that, Kent Fuchs.

**(Public Commenter 7) Bob Stille:**

Good afternoon. Thank you for the time. I'm Bob Stille. I'm a UF alum, gator dad. I'm also on UF Health Board. I'll concise my statements. Dr. Ono has supported DEI initiatives in the past as others in this room have and that rightfully has been a focus of some concern, but let me say this clearly:

People can change. In fact, many of the strongest leaders in our country today, Tulsi Gabbard, Bobby Kennedy, Elon Musk, and others have evolved over time.

Also, conservatives didn't win the popular vote by coincidence. People saw the light and changed from the previous election. That's not a weakness. It's a sign of maturity.

Dr. Ono made it clear through his words and actions that he understands how these initiatives have gone too far. He is committed to fostering a campus culture that values expression and academic excellence. He has been outspoken in his support for Jewish students, ensuring they feel safe and respected.

This man has come to our state because our state is free. He's not running for Michigan. (Timer chimes) He's running to us and what you put together in our higher education system is where he wants to serve. Please let him serve.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Thank you. We'll now hear from Kent Fuchs and then Fred Ridley.

**(Public Commenter 8) Kent Fuchs:**

Thank you. My comments are based in the context of two things. First off, I have, for nine years, held the position for which Dr. Ono is a candidate.

And then secondly, I know personally, virtually, all of the presidents of our nation's great universities. First, as has been said, Dr. Ono is unmatched nationally in both his credentials and his experience and his track record. And it's incredibly unusual for such a person to be willing to come take on a new challenge as he is willing to do here.

We're very, very fortunate as a state system and university. Secondly, I wanted to just mention about him personally. He is a warm individual that will be embraced by our students, by our faculty, staff, alumni, and indeed by members of boards and indeed state officials.

Dr. Ono is an accessible person, a person who leads with warmth, who leads with courage and indeed will lead our system as well as our university to the next level. Thank you. (Timer chimes)

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Thank you. We'll next hear from Fred Ridley and then Blake Cox.

**(Public Commenter 9) Fred Ridley:**

Thank you very much. I've had the pleasure of serving for the past four years on the UF Board of Trustees, working with Chair Hosseini, Vice Chair Patel, and a group of dedicated people who care only about one thing; what's best for the University of Florida.

(14:02 - 15:25)

They heard Dr. Ono for almost three hours a week ago. And after hearing his comments, asking him many questions, many of which I'm sure you'll ask today, we unanimously elected him as president of the University of Florida. I'd like to reiterate what President Fuchs said.

Dr. Ono is a kind and thoughtful person. He's a good listener. He has a high IQ and EQ.

I would just ask you to look past all the noise, listen to him today, and do what's right for the University of Florida. Thank you.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Thank you. Blake, you have one minute. And then we'll hear from Catherine Burgess.

**(Public Commenter 10) Blake Cox:**

Good afternoon. My name is Blake Cox and I'm currently serving as the student body president at the University of Florida. And I'm here today to speak in strong support of Dr. Ono's nomination to be our next University of Florida president.



First and foremost, Dr. Ono is incredibly qualified to hold this position, which has been previously discussed, as he comes from another top institution, the University of Michigan.

As UF strives to return to its previously held top five ranking, we must ensure that our leadership is of the highest caliber. The UF degree will be on the walls of over 10,000 new people every year, myself included. And with an accomplished leader like Dr. Ono, these degrees will become even more valuable as the U.S. ascends to top five and beyond.

(15:26 - 16:43)

As the public university with the highest Jewish population, antisemitism is something that all university leadership must take very seriously. I know Jewish students at the University of Michigan felt very supported by Dr. Ono. And since he had a strong relationship with the University of Michigan Hillel, he's already met with UF Hillel, the central address for Jewish life in Gainesville.

Support of our Jewish population is incredibly important. And I know Dr. Ono is already working to establish a strong relationship with our stakeholders. It is absolutely imperative that you approve Dr. Ono today. Thank you.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Thank you. Ms. Burgess, you may approach the microphone. All right. You have one minute.

**(Public Commenter 11) Catherine Burgess:**

Hello. Thank you. And I'm glad Dr. Ono is here because I'm a community member, UF alum, and I come here by way of the cognition and technology group at Vanderbilt at one point. And that's my interest, ideology.

And someone else said change over time. So I would love to study Dr. Ono's change over time. Because if we can take that and bottle it and present it to the country and use those same ways that he was able to change so quickly, I think that's my main sticking point is how was he able to change from DEI 2.0 to where he is today so very quickly.

(16:44 - 16:52)

And I would love to know articles, discussions, experiences. Please tell us. Thank you.

(16:54 - 17:58)

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Thank you. We'll now hear from Wendy Nisan and then Adriana McLamb.

**(Public Commenter 12) Wendy Nisan:**

Good morning. I'm Wendy Nisan, a proud Gator mom of two UF students and a Wharton graduate. I've seen what happens when universities surrender to politics and fail to lead. We chose UF over the Ivy League and because of its leadership, especially after October 7th when UF protected its students and upheld free speech with clear guardrails.

At Michigan, under Dr. Ono, it was the opposite. Jewish students were told to hide and stay quiet while radicals took over. He failed them and we noticed.

Now we're being asked to believe he's changed. But why take the risk? Florida doesn't need someone who's compromised in the past. We need a leader who's always stood firm for order,

fairness, and conservative values, not someone who expanded DEI bureaucracies and folded under pressure.

UF is thriving. Let's not go backward. Protect what makes UF exceptional.

(17:58 - 19:15)

I encourage you to vote no on Santa Ono. Thank you.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Thank you. Ms. McLamb.

**(Public Commenter 13) Adriana McLamb:**

Good afternoon. My name is Adriana McLamb and I am a Florida mom and a member of Independent Women's Network and I'm also a graduate of a Florida public university as well as a Florida high school.

I'm here today because I'm concerned about the possible appointment of Dr. Santa Ono as the president of University of Florida. This is not what Floridian families want. We worked hard to remove DEI, gender ideology, and climate extremism from our K-12 schools.

We don't want it smuggled back into our universities now. I would like to share the three reasons I believe this appointment would be a mistake.

First, Dr. Ono is not credible.

He says he's changed but for years he's put radical agendas in higher education. He's a climate extremist, has praised activists from the extreme edge of gender ideology, and endorsed a plan that called the hiring based on race and identity. Then the moment Florida became interested in him, he started talking like a moderate.

That's not conviction, that's optimism...Opportunism. Second, even if Dr. Ono has changed, what does that tell us? He claims he's only recently realized radical discrimination (Timer chimes) was wrong for the last 18 months and we need to encourage order and courage on campus.

(19:15 - 22:20)

Florida deserves better. Your students like me and my future son deserve better.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Thank you, Ms. McLamb. That concludes our public comment portion, Chairman.

(19:24 – 20:11)

**Brain Lamb:**

Okay, thank you. I'd like to keep us moving and before I do, I want to thank the members of the UF Board of Trustees for being in attendance.

It's quite compelling, you being here and sharing your voice. I know we typically like to have more time, but your presence alone, I see a number of you here. A few of you spoke obvious at the podium.

For those that didn't, I see Trustee Zalupski here as well. Thank you for being here and others. So, it means a lot and I know you guys have had a tough task and you have unanimously selected President Ono to be in front of us, so that's a good segue to Chair Hosseini. I would like to move to you and the floor is yours.

(20:12 – 28:43)

**Mori Hosseini:**

Thank you, Chair Lamb and good afternoon to everyone. Today, I have the honor of introducing Dr. Santa Ono and recommending him for confirmation as the 14th President of the University of Florida.

Although there is much to say about Dr. Ono's exceptional experience and qualifications, I want to keep my comments brief so that we can get to your discussion with him. The bottom line is that Dr. Ono is globally recognized as one of the most respected leaders in higher education and we are lucky to have him. Outside of Dr. Ono, there are very few people, if any, with the combination of ideological alignment with Florida and the operational experience to run a research powerhouse like UF.

When you compare budgets, the University of Florida has an overall budget of \$10.4 billion and UF Health budget of \$6 billion. Michigan has an overall budget of \$14.9 billion and Michigan Health is a budget of \$8.4 billion. The UF Presidency is not a position where someone can learn on the job.

And frankly, in all the public commentary about the appointment, I have not seen anyone focus on what it actually takes to lead the of Florida day in and day out. That experience matters. Last week, the Board of Trustees asked the tough and important questions about his record, his views, and his vision.

(22:22 - 23:19)

And as somebody says, we're not the potted plant. Record it and ask him to explain his prior statements. He addressed them head-on.

He made clear in no uncertain terms that his thinking of these issues has evolved. The appointment of Dr. Ono as the President of the University of Florida should be seen as a clear and consequential win for the Florida way and for anyone who believes in a strong excellence, accountability, and ideological balance in higher education. He had committed to this.

He knows he will be held accountable and he welcomes it. Dr. Ono chose to come to Florida because of our reforms, not in spite of them. He has seen firsthand how liberal orthodoxy that dominates many elite universities is failing, breeding division, eroding public trust, and compromising academic rigor.

The Florida model rooted in merit, viewpoint diversity, and the rejection of politicizing ideology resonate with him, and he wants to be part of it. Even groups that have done deep due diligence, like the leaderships at UF Hillel and Michigan Hillel, have come out publicly in his support. And let's not forget, Dr. Ono is far from the first leader to evolve in his thinking.

Ronald Reagan, once a Democrat who championed FDR's New Deal, became one of the most iconic conservative presidents in the history. Americans gave him a chance. Please give Dr. Ono a chance.

Clarence Thomas was a student of Malcolm X before becoming a staunch conservative voice on the Supreme Court. Like them, Dr. Ono's transition in thinking has been grounded in experience, reflection, and conviction. Isn't that the point of education? At its core, learning is about reflecting on our views, growing from experience, and refining our perspectives over time.

If we believe the Florida model represents a better path for higher education and for America's future, then we should want others to see that and be inspired to join us. If we are not willing to welcome those who come to embrace our approach because they have learned and evolved, then what exactly are we fighting for? The Florida approach to higher education is working and is attracting some of the most accomplished leaders in the country. This isn't a compromise.

It's a confirmation that our values are resonating and our model is winning. The Board of Governors has a strong history of affirming presidential nominees who received unanimous approval from their university boards. To continue this practice sends a message that the Board of Governors values the opinion of their colleagues with the state university system and does not yield to outsiders who post out-of-context soundbites on social media.

Look at the University of Florida. Who protected the Jewish student? Which Board of Trustees stood up on the meeting and said, we welcome every Jewish student to the University of Florida from the country. Anyone get threatened, get bothered, come to the University of Florida.

We welcome this Board of Trustees at University of Florida. Who got rid of DEI first at University of Florida? Who helped writing the bill on DEI? University of Florida, this Board of Trustees. It also says that the Board of Governors prioritize qualification and experience when, as Dr. Ono has done, a candidate demonstrates he wants to join our mission.

A vote to confirm Dr. Ono is a vote that the future of the University of Florida and the state of Florida system. It is also another big step towards continuing to build a model of American higher education that is respected around the world. On behalf of UF Board of Trustees, I am honored to recommend Dr. Santo Ono for confirmation as UF's 14th president. Thank you.

(28:44 – 29:45)

**Brian Lamb:**

Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. I was writing some notes.

I didn't do justice to recognizing you and your board for being here. I want to recognize David-- Trustee Brandon--It's good to see you. It's been a while. Great to have you here. Trustee O'Keefe, as well. I want to recognize you. I did get a chance to hear from Trustee Ridley and Trustee Cox, as well as a few others. And so I just want to, Trustee Ridley, of course.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the feedback, the presentation and the comments. I will now move, which is customary, now move to the candidate. So it is great to have you here, Dr. Ono.

Thank you for your willingness to engage in the state university system and join my colleagues here at the Florida Board of Governors. You obviously have been through the process at the trustee board. And now we're at this milestone. So with that, the floor is yours.

(29:46 – 39:00)

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Thank you very much, Chairman Lamb and all the members of the Board of Governors. It's really great to see you in person. I've admired your work for a long time.

And thanks, everyone in this room, all distinguished colleagues. I'm deeply honored to have been unanimously selected by the search committee and confirmed by the Board of Trustees to be president-elect at the University of Florida.

It's a privilege to join an institution that not only pursues excellence, but also sets the national standard for accountability and reform in higher education. I'm the son of immigrants, like many of you, who arrived in the United States in the late 1950s. My father was a mathematics professor.

I'm no good at math. My mother raised me and my two brothers. We're proud Americans, deeply grateful for this country's opportunities.

(30:37 - 32:28)

My wife, Wendy, is a public service lawyer and been married with her for 36 years. And we have two daughters, and we look forward to joining the Gator Nation. I studied at the University of Chicago, earned my PhD from McGill University in Montreal.

I'm a molecular immunologist with research focused on juvenile diabetes, allergic inflammation, and now macular degeneration, the leading cause of blindness in the Western world. I've served as a professor at Johns Hopkins University, Harvard University, and University College London. My leadership journey includes serving as provost and then president of the University of Cincinnati, then president of the University of British Columbia, and most recently president of the University of Michigan.

At Cincinnati, we oversaw \$1.85 billion academic and \$1.3 billion health budget. We launched a tech accelerator next to campus, began a \$1.7 billion fundraising campaign, which we finished ahead of schedule, and initiated a \$300 million campus renovation, with many buildings, the stadium, and the basketball arena all renovated. At UBC, a global top 20 university, public or private, I led a new strategic plan launched major academic units, secured landmark gifts, and laid the foundation for the \$3 billion capital campaign there.

At Michigan, we reached a \$2.04 billion annual research spend, launched a \$1.2 billion artificial intelligence ecosystem with partners like OpenAI. We created Centers for Civil Discourse and Fighting Antisemitism, the Wallenberg Institute, which you can read about. And we launched a \$7 billion campaign, and we've raised \$3.8 billion to date.

(32:29 - 33:54)

I bring this experience and a deep commitment to purpose-driven excellence to the University of Florida, an institution and a system that I've admired for a long time. Succinctly, my vision for UF is built on six core themes. To lead in interdisciplinary work and artificial intelligence integrated scholarship and research, something that UF already leads the world.

To advance the state's prosperity through aligned research and public service with a focus on citizenship. To continue to attract and retain global talent from coast to coast in North America. To integrate research across the student experience to make sure the student experience is second to none.

To continue to modernize infrastructure for innovation and expand our biomedical footprint beyond scripts. To secure national leadership through expanded competitive funding to ensure that this rocket of the University of Florida continues to rise. Let me briefly, Chair, you told me to be succinct, so I'll just focus on these three areas.

First, the topic of anti-Semitism that's been brought up by a number of people. At Michigan, we did respond. It was difficult at first, admittedly, strongly after October 7th.

(33:55 - 34:27)

And I have to tell you personally that October 7th really rocked my confidence in what's happening on campuses. As we work together with the regents of the institution to enact new policies, time, place, and manner policies, working with Jewish leaders, I had an entire anti-Semitism working group that supported me every step of the way. And I have to say here clearly that anti-Semitism is not just another bias.

It's dangerous. It's insidious. It's a distinct threat.

(34:28 - 34:55)

And I want to say really clearly that I will act decisively at Florida as I did at Michigan, protecting Jewish students. It's not a partisan issue. It is something that's moral and deeply personal to me.

Second, we've talked a little bit about diversity, equity, and inclusion. I support fully the decision to end DEI programs. I made a similar move in Michigan.

(34:55 - 36:25)

I arrived at Michigan in 2022, and one of the first things that was presented to me was the DEI 2.0 plan already created before I arrived. And I was asked for an increase in funding, which I refused. I and the regents then started to actually evaluate the program.

And not that far behind Florida, as you know, with 266, the University of Florida closed down its DEI offices and the program in 2024 in March, just a few months after we disallowed diversity statements and hiring and admissions decisions at the University of Michigan. And we closed down the offices, DEI offices and the program in entirety in March of 2025. Yes, my visions have evolved, as you've heard, but over 18 months since 2022.

And I'm here to ensure that DEI never returns to the University of Florida.

Third, a little bit about climate change. I support and work with the regents to create an institutional neutrality policy. I support that neutrality, and I think the president shouldn't be involved in espousing personal views. UF will be a hub, as it is, for rigorous, evidence-based research, not political advocacy. Science will lead, not ideology.

(36:27 - 37:32)

More broadly, universities must unite around merit, truth, and excellence. I want to come to Florida, not to slow reform, but to accelerate it with every ounce of energy that I have, with humility, clarity, and strength. To ensure alignment with Florida laws and values, I've established 12 commitments.

I want you to hear from me directly what those commitments are. I commit to keeping university resources apolitical, as is Florida law. I commit to ensuring ideological neutrality in evaluations of people and programs.

I commit to basing scholarships and admissions and hiring decisions solely on merit. I commit to auditing for DEI- related spending, public or private, it will not be permitted. I commit to appointing leadership aligned with Florida's mission of the governor and the legislature and you, the Board of Governors.

(37:33 - 37:56)

I commit to strengthening the post-tenure review that you have innovated, which I think is sorely needed. I commit to eliminating waste and inefficiency, and I commend the governor for his Department of Efficiency. And I commit to upholding all state laws and university regulations.

(37:57 - 44:06)

I've encouraged the board to make sure that these commitments are reflected in my contract, and I am happy to be held accountable for them moving forward. In closing, what makes UF distinct is its courage. While other institutions embrace ideological conformity, UF stands like a beacon for academic excellence, a commitment to civil discourse, something that this BOG put forward in 2022, and merit.

That's not only the right path, it's the one I will proudly uphold in partnership with you. Public universities exist to educate, not to indoctrinate. At Florida, you are redefining excellence, anchoring it in truth, merit, and purpose.

That's the path forward, and that's why I'm here before you today. Thank you.

(39:01 – 39:46)

**Brian Lamb:**

Dr. Ono, thank you. I appreciate you laying out the commitments at the end, by the way. That's quite important. I think some of that will obviously come up.

It is customary at kind of this juncture, now that we move quickly to the BOG, so Mr. Chairman, President...Dr. Ono, thank you. What I normally do, and what we've done for other president confirmations, is ask the BOG representative, Governor Lydecker, staring at you, my friend, to also kind of close out comments and open up the discussion for the board. It's quite customary.

I will start there with our tradition. Floor is yours, Governor Lydecker.

(39:47 – 54:46)

**Charles Lydecker:**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to report that the search process was thorough, transparent, and highly professional. The caliber of the candidates who engaged with us was extraordinarily high, an indication of how far the University of Florida has come, and how seriously the university has taken nationally.

As a recap of the process, and as I have previously reported to this board earlier in the year, the UF Board of Trustees approved the search committee's recommended qualifications document, marketing plan, and compensation range.

These documents became the basis for the search consultant to advise the position and engage with potential prospects. With the help of the search consultant, the search committee vetted prospects and ultimately identified a number of candidates to be interviewed. Almost all of these candidates were sitting presidents at prominent R1 universities across the country.

After completing these interviews, the search committees reached a consensus that Dr. Santa Ono, the president at the University of Michigan, was the most qualified and competitive finalist. Dr. Ono stood out not just for his credentials, which are among the strongest of any sitting university leader in the country, but for his steady hand, his humility, and his strategic vision. SP&A, the outside search consultant, uploaded media information regarding Dr. Ono to the search committee's online portal on March 31, a full month before the search committee selected Dr. Ono as the finalist on May 4. As part of the materials SP&A provided to the committee, it included a number of public articles that addressed his leadership at the University of Michigan, particularly in the area of DEI and antisemitism.

Those materials outlined how Michigan under Dr. Ono's leadership moved from having one of the most expansive DEI infrastructures in the country to ultimately shutting down its DEI offices. The materials also addressed Dr. Ono's evolving response to handling encampments and his leadership in standing up for Jewish students and confronting antisemitic behavior. The information also included details on Dr. Ono's transparency about his own mental health challenges.

In addition, with a simple Google search, we could see that Michigan's thinking on some ideological issues had evolved under Dr. Ono's leadership. What mattered most to us was where he was going to take the University of Florida. We asked him direct questions, and his answers were grounded in experience, not politics.

He was thoughtful, he was transparent, and he was consistent. Because Dr. Ono and all other sitting presidents involved in the search would only participate if the process was confidential and their name would only be publicly released if they were the sole finalist, the search committee determined that it would just simply be infeasible to move more than one finalist. Dr. Ono's selection as a sole finalist was announced on May 4th.

The university hosted on-campus forums on May 6th where faculty, students, administrators, and staff could hear from Dr. Ono about his background, his vision for the University of Florida, and his answers to questions submitted by UF stakeholders. The UF Board of Trustees interviewed Dr. Ono for almost three hours, and this interview, which I watched, has been and remains available for public viewing on the Florida Channel. The board then unanimously approved his appointment as president-elect.

(44:07 - 47:55)

It is the search committee's view that this appointment represents a new chapter for UF, a chapter that builds on excellence, demands accountability, and expects bold leadership. We believe Dr. Ono is the right person to lead the chapter forward. UF has the opportunity to hire the president from one of the few public universities ranked higher than UF.

With exceptional academic credentials and experience in running a 15 billion enterprise that includes a significant health care component, which is larger than U.F., a prominent athletic program not nearly as nice as U.F., and a world-class research and development arm, we have



before us a unique individual with tremendous experience whom the UF search committee and the UF Board of Trustees voted unanimously to support because this is the leader we believe can help the University of Florida become the number one public university in America. Let me say this. Dr. Ono's decision to pursue this role and to publicly align himself with Florida's approach to higher education is not something we should overlook.

In today's environment, that speaks volumes. He didn't need to take this path. He chose it.

That should give you all of, and all of us, confidence. Governor DeSantis set the standard firmly against anti-Semitism, hate, and ideological...runaway ideologies. While at the University of Michigan, Dr. (Ono) also understood and acted accordingly that student protesters and outside agitators should not be tolerated if they are creating an unsafe campus environment or interfering with a student's right to attend class.

He confirmed this view in a recent Inside Higher Education article stating that UF, and I quote, will be a place that Jewish students can feel fully supported and where all forms of hatred and discrimination are confronted clearly and without hesitation. I have a letter from Jonathan Greenblatt, which I can read...if you give me just a moment.

(Charles Lydecker begins reading the letter) Jonathan Greenblatt is the CEO and National Director of the ADL, which underneath the title of ADL is "Fighting Hate for Good."

"Dear President Ono, as stated May 23rd, congratulations on being named the sole finalist for the presidency at University of Florida. From our time together...from our time working together during the last year, I know that this is a big loss for University of Michigan community, but a great gain for Florida. Our conversations began last year during a very difficult time for American campuses.

Michigan was not immune and, in fact, was a focal point for protest activity that crossed the line into hate speech and harassment. Serious Michigan alumni and supporters introduced us that...in a way that ADL could help Michigan navigate the surge of anti-Semitism on campus. They were confident that you were committed to supporting Jewish students, faculty, and staff and that you would be willing to do the hard work and may I say they were right.

(47:56 - 51:12)

Over the last year under your leadership, Michigan has taken significant steps to improve the campus climate, enact new procedures and policies, and enforce the rules that govern conduct by students, faculty, staff, and campus organizations. I know you have worked hard to demonstrate your support for the Jewish community, sometimes at personal cost and threat to you and your family."

It goes on to congratulate but it's signed by Jonathan Greenblatt.

And I would like to also share two posts.

One is from the University of Michigan Hillel with a picture and it says, "Thank you President Ono for clearly stating anti-Semitism is in direct conflict with the university's deeply held values of safety, respect, and inclusion. It has no place with our community."

And UF Hillel with the meeting just occurred, “This morning we had the honor of welcoming Dr. Santa Ono to UF Hillel for a meaningful conversation about Jewish life at University of Florida. We appreciate the opportunity to share both the challenge and the opportunities facing Jewish students. Dr. Ono affirmed his long-standing commitment to supporting Jewish life on campus which is evident in his strong track record of working hand in hand with our Hillel colleagues at his previous institutions. We also discussed specific strategies to strengthen Jewish life at UF and were encouraged by his thoughtful and provocative approach. Following yesterday's approval by the University of Florida's Board of Trustees of Dr. Ono as the 14th President of the University of Florida pending confirmation by the Board of Governors, we were grateful that he accepted our invitation to visit Hillel today. His willingness to connect so early with Hillel and the Jewish community speaks to his commitment to ensuring a campus environment where...” And it keeps going on...can be safe and all students can prosper.

I also, moving on to the next topic, I also appreciate Dr. Ono's public leadership on mental health awareness and the importance of supporting UF's student population. He spoke openly during his interview with the UF Board of Trustees about his own battles as a young man of how those...of his own battles as a young man and how those experiences have shaped his leadership. In this post-COVID environment and consistent with the Board of Governor's efforts to support student thriving initiatives, students should have quick access to counseling, strong campus support, and a president who truly understands those needs.

I also want to say I appreciate Dr. Ono's evolution as a leader regarding DEI and the progressive orthodoxy that has gripped many and elite campuses. The toll of ideological excess has impacted campus culture academic standards and institutional trust. The original aim of DEI was faculty and student access.

(51:12 - 53:46)

That may have been a worthy theory but in practice it didn't work out that way. It became politically charged, risky to speak alternative views, and overly focused on bureaucracy rather than student outcomes. For anyone who believes Dr. Ono's earlier views on DEI, views that many university leaders and civic organizations once shared, are disqualifying despite his evolution and the changes made under his leadership at Michigan.

I would remind you that this body adopted DEI strategic priorities as recently as 2020. Like Michigan the Board of Governors has evolved since. There remains a diversity of views on DEI but today the state of Florida, the University of Florida, and this Board of Governors are united in governing by merit and viewpoint diversity.

We were told DEI would bring people together and strengthen our institutions, but that's not how it played out. Months before the president's executive order, Dr. Ono and the Michigan Board recognized that and made changes. There is no uncertainty about where Florida stands on DEI and equally there is no uncertainty about Dr. Ono's position.

He has a proven track record of integrity. I don't think anyone would worry that UF will suddenly become woke, so the real question is this: Should we punish someone for evolving beyond a view this very body once held, especially when that person has already led one of the nation's most prominent universities to a different course--a course that mirrors our own?

Dr. Ono was thoroughly vetted by the University of Florida Board of Trustees. I'm sure he'll be vetted again here today, as is the process, and as is appropriate, but the reality is this; his past positions are not meaningfully different from those previously held by this board. His actions today and over the last year tell the real story. He recognized the failure of a flawed philosophy and made a change.

There is something fundamentally unjust about cancel culture and to cancel Dr. Ono would not only be unjust it would be a setback for the University of Florida. I would rather stand behind a leader who has grown through experience and had the courage to change course than one who never did and never will. I support Dr. Ono.

I'm proud to have served on the search committee and I believe the University of Florida has found a president who will honor our standards and push UF to new heights. As an aside, I'd also like to recognize my fellow Board of Governor member and friend, Governor Cerio, and thank him for also being a thoughtful member of the search committee with me and now I would like to say thank you and Mr. Chairman that concludes my report and comments.

(54:47 – 54:56)

**Brian Lamb:**

Okay. Thank you, Governor.

Let's dive into questions. I typically ask our vice chair to get us going and then we will go around the floor. It's open to the Board of Governors.

(54:57 – 57:42)

**Vice Chair Alan Levine:**

Well, first of all, it's a pleasure to have you here today Dr. Ono and also to the trustees, each of whom is a friend and people I trust, and Charlie thanks for your comments as well.

Dr. Ono I'm going to ask you a series of questions that are pretty challenging and deliberately so. I watched the interview with the Board of Trustees and some of my questions were answered there. Those that didn't get answered, I'm going to ask you here.

There's been a lot of noise and you know on both sides of this issue and what I have to do is figure out what your track record is, how you think, how you arrive at decisions, and what motivates the decisions you make in a complex environment and so that's the tenor of the questions I'm going to ask.

First, during the interview with the trustees, trustee Ridley asked you about merit and in your answer, you said that basically what the Supreme Court found in the 2023 ruling is pretty aligned with your view and that, this is a quote, "...pretty aligned with my view and that is meritocracy really provides individuals an even playing field of the selection and support of students that, through their hard work and performance, are really the best in terms of merit."

You also said, "There isn't any involvement of criteria that will influence those selections beyond merit." Which, I like that answer, but it surprised me because in 2000, I'm going to go through a little history here, in 2016 when the Supreme Court upheld the decision, consideration of race and

admissions, you tweeted, "I applaud the Supreme Court ruling on the consideration of race and admissions. Holistic review can diversify campuses and the future workforce."

So, you took a pretty firm position on keeping race-based admissions and eliminating the use of mandatory admission testing and the use of other screening tools like AP exams and credits. As you know, in 2003 the Supreme Court again upheld the narrow race-based admissions in a case involving Michigan's law school.

Then in 2006, the voters of Michigan overwhelmingly banned the use of race-based admissions and then in 2023, the Supreme Court, just under two years ago, the Supreme Court reversed and banned the use of race-based admissions as a factor in admissions.

In a statement you issued at that time, you acknowledged that the ruling did not impact Michigan because it was already complying with the constitutional mandate, but yet, you felt compelled to issue a statement and in it you said, "[I am] deeply disheartened by the court's ruling."

In your statement, you advocated that using race and admissions is better than race-neutral policies.

So given that your entire body of work has been one of advocating for race considerations and admissions why did you tell the Board of Trustees that the Supreme Court ruling is aligned with your view?

(57:43 – 1:00:14)

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Thank you very much for the question and thank you for the dates. You know that's been mentioned here before, and in some of the decisions of this board itself. In 2016, that was almost nine years ago, in very early stages of DEI programs and as has been mentioned, I and many other leaders felt at the time that equal opportunity for all was something that most people would reasonably support and so to answer your question about why a lot of time has elapsed since 2016 also 2022, as you know here in the state of Florida, 266 occurred in 2023 and the actual decision to close offices here in Florida there's been evolution in Florida as there has been across the whole country and that's mirrored by me as well.

And so, to answer your question, why did I change between for over nine years and also from 2022 to 2025? It was in, I would say, Fall the first semester of 2022 when I arrived at the University of Michigan, and as I said, the DEI 2.0 program which has been mentioned, a very large one, was presented to me it had already been created and submitted to me.

I decided not to enhance that funding, even though a request was made, because I wanted to evaluate whether it was working and after that 2022 period, over this entire period of time, not only did we assess whether the DEI investments were working, we're also trying to listen to feedback that we received and a lot of that feedback that we got was that the bureaucracy was too large, that there might be an increase in divisiveness that's...that perhaps was a result of this and third, that certain groups were not actually supported by the DEI program, so all that experience to answer your question fed into the evolution of thought over that period of time and that's happened across North America as well and continues to this day.

**Alan Levine:**

That's...I appreciate the answer. I didn't ask about DEI.

I asked, why did you tell the Board of Trustees a week ago that the Supreme Court ruling was aligned with your thinking when in 2023, you put out a statement expressing your profound disappointment in the ruling? Do you currently believe in the use of race or non-merit factors in admission?

(1:00:15 – 1:01:37)

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I do not. I do not and it's based upon experience, that's why I mentioned what the evolution of thought not just by myself, but Florida and the higher education space in general.

**Alan Levine:**

Yeah, so after the Supreme Court ruling in 2023, you did an interview on PBS where you advocated for a holistic admissions process, looking less at AP exams and classes and looking less at standardized tests.

In January of this year, you implemented a holistic admissions process; going to test optional. What I'm trying to get at is what you've said before now until a week ago you support alternatives to merit-based admissions like holistic and you implemented it just this semester, so I want to understand, do you believe, as you have in fact advocated and implemented this year, in test optional, looking less at AP courses, is the right policy or do you now no longer believe in holistic admissions, which you just put in place at Michigan?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Thank you for that question. As you know these sorts of decisions are made in conversation with the entire board and with the provost and the deans of the institution. To answer your question, I believe that standardized tests are very, very important because it focuses on merit, so I wanted to answer your question.

**Alan Levine:**

Okay, so your position on that has evolved since January?

(1:01:38 - 1:06:36)

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Yeah, I mean that the position was not mine, as I said, it was a position of the entire institution, but my personal to answer your question about me; I have advocated for using standardized tests because of my conviction that merit should be...that decisions should be made...admissions decisions should be based upon merit.

**Alan Levine:**

Okay, in your interview with the Board of Trustees you referenced that you eliminated the DEI programs at Michigan and I point out, that you did close the DEI office and program in March after President Trump's executive order and a slew of other federal actions that really threatened, and you cited that in your announcement, that really threatened funding for universities that continued those programs. So, in truth, continuing the DEI programs would have had a disastrous implication for Michigan and any other school that continues them.

You referenced in your interview, a scathing story, in your interview last week, a scathing story that was in the New York Times in October of 2024, and it heavily criticized Michigan's DEI programs quoting students and some faculty about the culture it created on campus. October 22nd of 2024, a few months ago, in response to the story your provost sent an email message to colleagues throughout campus that said, "Our critics cast our DEI efforts as consisting solely of discrete programs. This is a misunderstanding. Our DEI programming, which is excellent, is only one part of the picture.

Diversity equity and inclusion permeate all we do on campus because they are a part of our core values," Core values that you implemented back into 2023, "Our core values," this is part of the quote, "Our core values are not changing."

So, this was obviously well into the timing of when you said you had begun the conversion away from DEI.

Your provost was being honest and her honesty captured exactly what the insidious nature of DEI is. It's not programming, Dr. Ono, it is a culture and underbelly that exists, which you can't merely close. It takes a deeply held conviction and resilience to root it out, and by the way, I believe it still exists at UF and I'll talk about that in a little bit, but first what your provost said about DEI being a part of Michigan's core values and those values not changing was a definitive statement that would seem to indicate a decision was made to keep the elements of DEI "Permeated in everything we do on campus including in its core values." Did you ever direct that DEI be removed from Michigan's core values?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I would say that they are all removed now. The provost of the university, that was her statement, she was at the university for quite some time. She was dean of the dental school for about a decade and so that was her statement, not mine. I would say, in addition, that the decision to actually start to evaluate DEI programs, as I said, started when I first arrived in 2022.

If you, and I know you've looked very carefully, and in June of 2023 soon after UF closed the DEI programs, a committee was struck to look at DEI statements, that's in the public record, in fall of that year, in November, we actually eliminated diversity statements and hiring admissions, so it clearly shows that for this entire period of time, we've been evaluating and making tough decisions and I will continue to do that here in Florida.

**Alan Levine:**

Yeah, and I note that your faculty, with a 60% vote, recommended the removal of the diversity statements and I credit the faculty for recommending that. I will say, the answer you just gave, the question I asked is, did you direct that the core values be changed? Because, prior to removing the office, your provost, who presumably you work very closely with, told everybody, our core values aren't changing and, in fact, they have not changed.

Your core values, which I have right here and are currently on the website, cites diversity equity and inclusion as core values of the university and the example behaviors on the core values say acknowledging and managing one's own biases, advocating for an inclusive hiring process, and challenging behaviors that may lead to unjust outcomes. What are unjust outcomes?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Well, the core values you're mentioning are part of something called the Culture Journey that occurred several years before I even arrived, as you know, and you know my decision was as I've said very clearly to close the DEI programs and the sunset to program, you know, there may be something still on the website I think if you go to the UF union you'll see diversity and inclusion still on it, as you've said yourself, there's still some of it there so I think it's something like that but to be very clear, I have been crystal clear about my desire to close down the DEI programs for the reasons I mentioned in the interview.

(1:06:37 – 1:08:23)

**Alan Levine:**

All right so at Michigan, race and identity courses are strewn throughout your underclassmen curriculum. As an example, in the college of business, I noticed that there's a requirement for an inclusive leaders pathway, a mandatory pathway designed to introduce business students to DEI, justice, and belonging. Students must complete all components of the milestone requirement in order to receive a business degree. Other schools require credits in race and ethnicity, where a course satisfying the requirement must provide for the meaning of race, ethnicity, racism, racial and ethnic intolerance, and the resulting inequality and comparisons of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, social class and gender.

Students do not have the option of choosing these courses; they are mandatory. So, two-part question; Number one: Did you give any direction to the provost or anyone to eliminate these requirements throughout the University of Michigan?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

The answer is yes, that audit is happening as we speak right now. The decision to close the DEI programs was in March of this year, but it's a very, very large university with 19 schools and colleges, many, many departments, and the audit process is actually ongoing as we speak.

So, it will take a little bit of time. It doesn't switch off like a like a switch and those are having, just like you said, there's still some in Florida institutions as well.

**Alan Levine:**

Yeah, true and um, so, we, so I...I would like to hear a commitment from you, if you can. Will you make it a priority to identify those courses at the University of Florida and do the same thing?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Yes, as I said, that's what we're doing at Michigan right now and I would make it a priority to continue the work of this government, the legislature, and this board.

(1:08:24 - 1:10:50)

Very similarly, after the closing of the DEI office here in the program, I know that there have been reviews of courses, as you have mentioned, and I commit to continuing to do that, supporting that.

**Alan Levine:**

I have an email that was distributed to the College of Medicine faculty on April 1st of 2025, just two months ago. It said, "As those of you in the faculty meeting this morning heard, there's been some

discussion about how to approach the reframing of some of the work we do to ensure alignment with the federal orders.”

This email provides a slide deck articulating a key goal is to, “Communicate about what we do in a way that doesn't trigger,” and to, “Recognize that certain words have become polarizing and identify alternative phrasing.”

The deck points to alternative language to use when discussing diversity, equity, inclusion and marginalized communities. On our own campus, and I'm going somewhere with this, just a month ago, my friend Dr. Fuchs, who I have enormous respect for was caught on camera saying, being brutally honest about the intentions of hiding behind alternative language and continuing to infuse the work of DEI throughout the institution, but using another name.

Dr. Fuchs advised the faculty on video, ironically, not to talk about DEI when interviewing dean candidates if the interview is on video but rather talk about it privately.

This is exactly what people like me are concerned about. It's insidious that it feels like pushing a rope uphill when we establish these policies, if a president doesn't really believe in those policies and it's a powerful position.

You can be an inhibitor, or you can help advance, and so I guess so much of your record reflects your deeply held beliefs that you have been an advocate of DEI up until recently. I just, I guess I'm wondering why did you stop only at closing the functions that were necessary to protect Michigan financially from the Trump administration's policies, but not also take the really hard steps of putting forth clear directives. I can't find the directives.

I looked. I've asked. I can't find the directives where you said change the core values, get rid of these courses. I just I can't find them. I'd like to see them, but it looks to me like you got rid of the program because you needed to do what you had to do with the president's orders and the funding issues, but you didn't really push to get rid of DEI.

(1:10:51 – 1:12:09)

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

So, I'll answer both questions.

First of all, to your first question, as the president of University of Florida, I will do everything to ensure that there's nothing that's hidden, that there will be a full audit, and those sorts of programs will not have a place at the University of Florida, to be very clear.

In terms of the University of Michigan, as I said, I started to think about the DEI programs in 2022, the fall of '22, when I arrived, when I was presented a DEI 2.0 plan, like I said, in summer of 2023, we already started thinking about DEI statements. In November of 2024, those were disallowed, the DEI statements and hiring admissions, and in March of 2025, everything was closed down. So to answer your question, it's actually took quite a period of time, many, many months, that it wasn't a sudden change. It was looking at the impact of the programs, listening to what I felt were some negative consequences of DEI programs that fed into my decision, but to answer your first question clearly, I will not permit things to be hidden, there will be a full, full audit and I will continue to make sure that those that the institution, UF, abides by state and federal law.



(1:12:10 – 1:12:54)

**Tim Cerio:**

Mr. Chair, can I get me, just a line, just a timeline clarification? I don't mean to...

**Brian Lamb:**

We'll come here, and then I've got a few more...

**Alan Levine:**

Wait, I'm still not done.

**Brian Lamb:**

You're still rolling?

**Alan Levine:**

Oh, yeah.

**Brian Lamb:**

Okay.

**Tim Cerio:**

Just a clarification, Governor Levine, if you're okay with that, because I want to understand the timeline. President Ono, I thought there was a statement in October of 24 about DEI 2.0 where you mentioned, or you were stated, the DEI is a core value of the university and "We must not back down in the face of renewed adversity." That was in October of 24.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I'm not sure about what document you're talking about.

**Tim Cerio:**

When did DEI 2.0 roll out?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

In 2022.

**Tim Cerio:**

And then, but this was a statement...all right. I'll provide the statement. Thank you. Okay, sorry, Alan.

(1:12:55 – 1:15:20)

**Alan Levine:**

Dr. Ono, while at the University of British Columbia, you authored an education module called "COVID-19 and the Environment." In the module, you said, "By the end of this module, you should be able to appreciate how environmental impacts are socially organized, including through environmental racism and settler colonialism."

The first section is titled "A Brief Introduction to Settler Colonialism and Environmental Racism." Incidentally, I bought your book, so I'm a member of your book club.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Which book did I write?

**Alan Levine:**

Well, it's a module. It's a module.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Oh, okay.

**Alan Levine:**

Yeah, the first section of your module is titled "A Brief Introduction to Settler Colonialism and Environmental Racism," and it asks the question, "How can we work toward environmental justice?"

You conclude your module by saying, "University students like you can put pressure on politicians and decision makers to take advantage of this once in a lifetime opportunity."

What I couldn't find in the module that you wrote, any alternative perspectives about this issue. Do you think it's appropriate practice to tell students that one point of view and then advocate for them to become political activists on that view without providing them the fact that there are other perspectives that students should be exposed to, so we could teach them to think critically?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I absolutely agree that they should be a diversity of viewpoints shared and they should think critically, that's what attracted me to the University of Florida. The thing that you're mentioning to the University of British Columbia has 60,000 students and it has multiple campuses.

I didn't write that myself. There are offices to write these things. I completely believe that it was released when I was there but I certainly didn't write that module myself.

**Alan Levine:**

Well, it's got your name on it. It's directly to...

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Sure, my name's a lot of things at the institution I've led but I didn't personally write a module. I don't have that kind of time.

**Alan Levine:**

Did Carson...did Carson had...did you want...

**Carson Good:**

No—

**Alan Levine:**

Oh, okay.

**Carson Good:**

I just don't know how you put your name on...I don't know how that works, but, go ahead.

**Alan Levine:**

Your proposed contract with the University of Florida states that you'll be the chair of the UF Health Board of Directors and it further says you'll establish the system's mission and strategic direction.

You were also the board chair for University of Michigan Health and I suspect you had similar responsibilities in that role.

(1:15:21 - 1:18:51)

The University of Michigan Health Children's Hospital website has a page dedicated to the provision of gender care for children and teens. Gender care for children outside of legitimate physical medical issues where it's widely agreed medical intervention is necessary is synonymous to many people as the use of harmful chemicals and even surgery that attempts to alter a child's sex. The website at UM, at Michigan, promotes that it provides quote comprehensive care for transgender, non-binary, and gender diverse children, and it says the center will help children achieve their gender goals.

On January 28th of 2025, President Trump signed an executive order banning the transition of people under the age of 19. Shortly after this, Corwell Health, which is a large system in Michigan, announced it was stopping this program, although they report they never did gender surgeries on children. University of Michigan Health did perform surgeries on children the volume of which I don't know.

At the time Corwell announced they were stopping Michigan Health issued a statement dated February 12<sup>th</sup>, just a few months ago, which said it is assessing the impact of the order on its health care services and will provide high quality, accessible care while ensuring compliance with the law.

"Our team believes that identifying with a gender that is different than one's sex is a normal part of the human experience." It's one thing to say you'll comply with the law, which I would hope you would, but outside of the law what are your personal beliefs about what the role of UF Health should be in this area?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Yeah, I...the current position of the of UF Health is one that that I support. I am the chair of Michigan...I was the chair of Michigan Medicine and as you know there's a large board there with multiple views and, as you mentioned, they're assessing the situation in response to the President's executive orders. My understanding is that the surgical interventions have ceased. I'm not know...I'm not sure exactly where they are right now because there hasn't been a meeting that I attended recently of UM Health but to answer your question, I would support the laws of the state of Florida regarding that.

**Alan Levine:**

Did you take any action as chair of University of Michigan Health to stop doing gender services for children or that only came after the President?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

No, when I was there, this was a matter of active debate, as you said, this occurred in February and so,, while I was there the conversations were occurring. I think there are very rare surgical interventions. I think that the use of pre-adolescent hormonal therapy might have been occurring still and counseling but they were assessing the situation. Absolutely that is correct at that time.

**Alan Levine:**

Okay. October 7<sup>th</sup>, as you know, there was...and what I'm after here is I want to know what your thinking was at the time. I accept what what's been provided for us by the ADL and others, but I also take the words of of students like Benny Shefsky who today was...put a video out and he had some pretty compelling things to say about the situation at the campus while he was there as a student.

What I'm...so I'm going to try to better understand your deeply held personal beliefs and how they impact your decisions. October 7<sup>th</sup> happened, there's a slaughter, and October 9<sup>th</sup>, while President Ben Sasse participated in a vigil on UF's campus to support Israel and while our Chancellor issued a directive to university presidents reminding them of their responsibility to protect Jewish students, you gave a speech at a DEI conference on campus. I watched your remarks.

(1:18:52 - 1:24:14)

You did not say one word about the attack that had just occurred two days earlier. You referenced the challenges of the day as being the Supreme Court ruling on race-based admissions, which you were disappointed by, and you mentioned the need for a holistic admissions process, linking it to DEI and making it a priority which, as we stated earlier, you implemented. This audience was likely friendly to those issues but possibly not friendly when it came to Israel.

Why, on October 9<sup>th</sup>, two days after, did you not say something at that meeting? This was the this was your DEI infrastructure on the whole campus and Israel had just been attacked two days earlier. I want to understand your thinking--why you did not think it was important, then, to say something.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Thank you. I'm sure you can find that I actually did release a university-wide campus email-

**Alan Levine:**

But the next day.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

-condemning Hamas. And then following that, as you know, I've spoken at the Javits Center in Manhattan at the ADL conference and I spoke at the AJC National Committee talking about the need for universities and presidents to be directly involved in combating anti-Semitism. So, I did respond to the whole university community. I'm sure it's still out there.

**Alan Levine:**

Yeah, but why didn't you say anything October 9<sup>th</sup> when you had...you had a whole audience. It was your first opportunity to say something. Why? I'm trying to get to how you're thinking cause I-

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Yeah, I think that my message to the whole community was around the same time. So, I think I didn't feel like I needed to say the same thing in multiple venues. But there was no...there was no reason why I didn't want to. But I don't recall what happened because that was quite some time ago. But I did mention to the entire community my condemnation of the attack by Hamas.

**Alan Levine:**

Fair enough. You're familiar with SAFE, Students Allied for Freedom and Equality, which is an affiliate for Students for Justice in Palestine. I'm sure you're very familiar with them. After October 7<sup>th</sup>, they celebrated the murder, torture, rape, and kidnapping of men, women, and children.

They were permitted to continue their activities on campus, increasingly creating fear for a whole group of students on campus. In November of 2023, this group, SAFE, violently entered the administration building and had to be removed ultimately by the use of police force. Shortly after this in January of 2024, SAFE received the University of Michigan Martin Luther King Jr. Spirit Award.

They received an award. For Martin Luther King Jr., an award that recognizes students and groups who exemplify the leadership and vision of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. A month later, this same group went on to participate in the encampment on your campus. Dr. Ono, in Florida in October of 2023, our chancellor sent a letter to all university presidents highlighting the connection between Students for Justice in Palestine and their support of Hamas and encouraged universities to remove these groups from campus and some of our universities did that very quickly after that. I guess, not only did SAFE receive an award, their threatening and damaging behavior continued to escalate till they finally showed up at the home of a regent.

Only then, they were suspended for only two years. There's a saying, Dr. Ono, that evil flourishes when good people do nothing. Sometimes leadership is very lonely but it's never wrong to recognize right from wrong and stand up and say it when you see it.

My question is, what was your thinking during that period of time--not what happened after--what was your thinking as you were dealing with this on campus? Was it appropriate for SAFE to receive a prestigious award named for a man who believed in non-violence and who was a strong supporter of Israel's right to exist?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

So, the answer is no, it was not appropriate for them to receive the award. The award was actually--I'm sure you've seen this and it's in the public domain--was the recipients were selected by a group of individuals not the university administration. They were many of them were in campus life and staffers across the institution; they selected the individual. We actually, as you know, the provost of the institution, we discussed this, actually revoked that award, so they no longer have the award and, as you said, the SAFE has been banned from campus for two years.

**Alan Levine:**

Dr. Ono, that's not true that you did not revoke the award. They relinquished it when you revoked the president's award. The president of SAFE also got the award, not just SAFE, but their president after she advocated for murder on the internet. Yes, her award was revoked. In response to that, SAFE and other student groups renounced the award, so you did not remove their award, you just removed the president's. When you arrived-

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

If that's the case, I'll go back and look but certainly, as you said, Salma Hammami, that award was revoked and it is true, as you said, that the organization's been banned from campus for two years.

**Alan Levine:**

When you arrived at UM, at Michigan, on a Tuesday afternoon, you visited the Trotter Multicultural Center and you addressed the Black Student Union. They had recently announced their platform on campus and some of their posters got torn down.

By Thursday, two days later you issued a statement condemning the harmful and destructive actions and I applaud you for doing that. That was wrong, it shouldn't have been done, and you immediately acted to condemn it. I guess, as I just mentioned, that SAFE was doing all the stuff they were doing on campus, got an award, and then there was an encampment for 30 days.

(1:24:15 - 1:29:16)

You issued a statement two days after the Black Student Union posters were torn down but I can't find very much, in the public sphere, where you openly and forcefully condemned what was going on with the encampment and with Jewish students on campus being terrified. Again, I want to know what your thinking was. Why would you say something two days after being at the Black Student Union about posters being torn down and not say something forcefully when people were holding up posters saying, "Globalize the Intifada?"

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Yes, I actually agree that I should have been more forceful and it was a very scary time for higher education, if you recall. There were encampments that had sprung up on campuses. In many cases, I don't if you remember, at UCLA there was quite a bit of violence, there were three hours of fights occurring with blunt objects. It was a time of concern for all leaders, universities, and regents. We were trying to monitor the situation, trying to not have that escalated, and so I wanted to answer your question. These were very different kinds of situations; a situation where there were some flyers as opposed to the whole nation looking at very dangerous situations on campuses. So, these were not easy things, they're not for that...it's not an apples to apples comparison. It's a very, very challenging time on many campuses across America.

**Alan Levine:**

It was, but there were examples where it wasn't scary because there was decisive leadership that said 'no' and that was right here at the University of Florida, thanks to the Board and to Dr. Sasse.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

And that's absolutely right and that's exactly what I'll do and moving forward and if you can...if you look at what's happened on the University of Michigan campus since, there have been no encampments, there have been no occupations of buildings, and that's because of the bold action by the Regents and I to adjust policies, time, place, and manner, regulations that have resulted in a much safer campus...more peaceful campus over this past year.

**Alan Levine:**

And so, I, Mr. Chair, I just have two more and then...and then...because I know other people have questions and I'm sorry but I really wanted to get this stuff out. There's an audio which captures

you saying, "The government could call me tomorrow and say in a very unbalanced way, the university is not doing enough to combat antisemitism, and I could say it's not doing enough to combat Islamophobia, and that's not what they want to hear. So, the whole situation is not balanced." What did you mean by that?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Well, that was around the period of time when my colleagues, Claudine Gay, Elizabeth McGill, and Sally Cornblith, had been, as you know, on CNN, in front of the House Education and Workforce committee. I would say now, very clearly, that the focus on antisemitism is appropriate because most of the Title VI violations occurring have to do with antisemitism.

There were a couple of doxing incidents on campus involving Muslim students and so that was what I was referring at the time but I can say very clearly that the focus of the House Education and Workforce committee, initially chaired by Virginia Foxx, and then Tim Wahlberg, is appropriately focused now on antisemitism. As I said, what happened on October 7th deeply affected the members of my community and me personally and so, at UF, I would be consistently focused on making sure that antisemitism does not rear its head again.

**Alan Levine:**

Well, and I guess...I guess...again, at the time...Can you hear me?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I can.

**Alan Levine:**

Okay, at the time, I know there was a center created on campus...I'm going to move on. I'm going to let somebody else-

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Let me just say, just respond real quickly. We're very proud of the Raoul Wallenberg Institute that I founded with Regent Ron Weiser. Raoul Wallenberg was an extraordinary graduate of the University of Michigan that risked his own life to save thousands of Jewish individuals lives during the holocaust. We founded that institute and an institute for civil discourse precisely because we wanted to understand the root causes of antisemitism and root it out, not only on our campus, but in educational institutions, K-12, to university...to universities around the country and the Institute of Civil Discourse is really aligned with this BOG's 2022 commitment on civil discourse and so there's a lot of alignment between the decisions we made and what's happening here in Florida.

**Alan Levine:**

Well, you mentioned that center, I...of just...the Raoul Wallenberg Institute. You know, there was...there were some emails that were sent. I guess, at one point, that months after you guys had approved that institute, you were not using the word antisemitism in the name of the title and that's the email from two of your regents. One said, "I understand the theory behind leaving antisemitism out of the title. It may seem more inclusive... but the sentiment takes political correctness, inclusion, hand-wringing...to an absurd level."

(1:29:17 - 1:32:40)

So, what was your...what was your reluctance to use antisemitism in the title of the institute?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I'm very happy to answer that question. I had no reluctance personally. The Raoul Wallenberg Institute is within the College of Literature Science and the Arts (LSNA) and the decision...the hesitation was not mine, it was a hesitation of the founding director of the institute, Jeffrey Weidlinger. I'm very supportive of the word antisemitism being in in the institute. In fact, I was disappointed, like Regent Bernstein, that that the founding director chose not to include the word antisemitism.

**Alan Levine:**

Okay, last question.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

There's no reluctance on my part.

**Alan Levine:**

Last question. I'd like to better understand your process for prioritization in your decision making and...the...sorry, I lost my note here. Access to college...a college degree is increasingly out of reach at many universities. In-state tuition at Michigan, right now, is triple what it is in Florida.

In Florida, we believe lower cost access to a Florida degree is the best way to lift up all students. We started this process when your chair, Chair Hosseini, was chair of this board. I noticed that the University of Michigan has increased tuition every year since 2013 and during your short tenure you boosted tuition in both of your budgets.

My understanding is that when you shut down the DEI programs, you were spending somewhere in the neighborhood of 30 million dollars. I understand you shifted those dollars to student facing programs like celebrating cultural and ethnic programs, financial aid for low-income students, fostering community and belonging, preserving the multicultural center and the spectrum center for gender and sexuality, mental health, and as I said financial aid.

I'm curious, and again, I'm getting trying to get at what you how you prioritize. Since all students were contributing to the cost of the DEI programs of 30 million, rather than spending those dollars somewhere else, did you not consider taking a position to hold the line on tuition and put...return those dollars to the students by returning the cost of tuition?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

So, first, I want to applaud the university system of Florida and UF for holding tuition and cost of attendance low. That's why this is the number one state system in the country and I would put everything...all energy to look at costs to make sure that remains the case, number one. Number two, the vast majority and this is still happening, it's in this budget year because the decision to close DEI was in March of this year, so that the discussions about the budget are happening between now and July. So, this is an in-process conversation, so the decisions are not yet concrete.

But, what we said in my statement to the entire community is, we want to reallocate that primarily to supporting all students. They supported two programs, the Go Blue Guarantee, which actually provides a full tuition for all students based upon ability to pay, Michiganders, not out-of-staters, and also provided full cost of attendance scholarships in certain areas like nursing and education



where we really wanted to support careers that were that were not being filled to the need... meeting the need of the workplace. So, most of the money was really focused on addressing affordability through scholarships.

(1:32:41 - 1:35:05)

**Alan Levine:**

Thank you. Thank you for that.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

You're welcome.

**Brian Lamb:**

Okay, I'm going to come here, Governor Renner, then I'm going to come quickly here to Jose Oliva. I know our faculty governor would like to speak as well so, took up a lot of time, I understand, let's get rolling.

**Paul Renner:**

Thank you, Chair, and I'm going to just note for the public that doesn't have the benefit of these documents,<sup>1</sup> that I've posted these on my X account, @paul\_renner, since the members in the audience don't have the ability to see them as well as those that are that are watching, but I think it's important for us to lay down the public record and that's what I'm going to spend a few minutes trying to do.

Dr. Ono, good afternoon. You've said in your testimony to the Board of Trustees as well as today that you began to evolve on DEI over a year and a half ago, sometime in late 2023, is that correct?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Actually, I wanted to correct that, like I said, the first time I had to consider the DEI 2.0 program... program was in fall of 22 when I arrived and, as I said, the request was made for additional funding to the program, which I did not agree to, because I wanted to assess the program.

So, my thinking really started in late 2022, actually, but the regents and I really started to think about the ROI of DEI programs from late, late 2023. So, in November of 2023, that's when the...the conversation occurred in a serious nature.

**Paul Renner:**

Okay, let's take a look at the documents. You have the documents there in front of you to your right. Let's take a look at tab number one, please.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Okay.

**Paul Renner:**

Which is an article from October 23, 2023, from the Michigan Daily. It's titled, "UMICH Officially Launches DEI 2.0 Plan." Now, you've referenced that plan in your opening inaugural speech earlier in 2023. You called for DEI 2.0. Is that correct?

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<sup>1</sup> Material referenced is on file with the Board of Governors office.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

DEI 2.0 was created before I arrived. There was an interim president called Mary Sue Coleman who was there before. The director of the program was somebody called Tabby Chavez, who had been appointed in the summer of this year, but prior to my arrival in 2022.

And so, it was presented to me, pretty much fully baked, with a request for additional funding, which I refused because I wanted to study the situation. I was a brand new president. I wanted to study the situation.

(1:35:06 - 1:36:56)

**Paul Renner:**

Let me restate my question. When you first gave your inaugural speech to tell people what you believed in and what kind of leader you would be and where you would take the organization, did you roll out and say that you wanted to see the DEI 1.0 plan that you had to have a DEI 2.0 plan?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I think I mentioned a 2.0 plan, yes, because it had been presented to me before that. Yes, when I arrived.

**Paul Renner:**

And is that the DEI 2.0 plan that's in this first tab, tab one? Is that the rollout of that DEI 2.0 plan? Did that occur in October of 2023?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I think so. I think that's about right. I'm not, I haven't been studying these top documents, but I think so, yeah, sounds about right.

**Paul Renner:**

Take a look at page two at the very top. You mentioned Tabby Chavez. Was she your principal person responsible for the DEI program while you were at Michigan?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

So you're talking about the New York Times article, right?

**Paul Renner:**

Pardon?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

The New York Times article.

**Paul Renner:**

No, no, no. I'm at tab one.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Oh, tab one. Tabby Chavez was directed by, was appointed by my predecessor, Mary Sue Coleman, who was interim president. So, she was already there. Tabby was already there before I arrived and they had been working on DEI 2.0.

**Paul Renner:**

Was she your principal person in charge of DEI during your tenure?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

She was the vice provost of diversity in the provost office and she was the chief diversity officer as well. But yes, that would be the top-ranking person at the institution, correct.

**Paul Renner:**

And she says here, at the top of page two of tab one, "Our work in DEI 2.0 is doubling down and not backing down on DEI," Chavez said. And my question for you, was that your intent in DEI 2.0?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

No, because, as I said, it was around that time that a budgetary request was asked of me, which I didn't approve and never approved.

**Paul Renner:**

Okay. And then let's jump in that, in light of your answer, let's jump to tab three. If you would turn to tab three and it's a single page.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I see it.

(1:36:57 - 1:41:05)

**Paul Renner:**

You see that? And there's a statement there by you and this is from the DEI 2.0 year one progress report. So, we fast forward a year later in October of 2024, a year after the DEI 2.0 rollout, and you have this statement here. Do you recognize that statement?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I do.

**Paul Renner:**

Okay. Would you read that? It's pretty short. Would you read your statement on the one year anniversary of DEI 2.0?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

"Our dedication to academic excellence is deeply intertwined with our commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion. I'm convinced that we cannot be excellent without being diverse in the broadest sense of the word. Inclusion and equity, respect, diversity, integrity, these are core values of the university. They must be at the heart of everything we do. We must not back down in the face of renewed adversity."

**Paul Renner:**

Okay. And were you aware of efforts prior to that time? So, in October of 2024, Florida, I was in the legislature at the time, had taken a sledgehammer to DEI in early 2023 before your rollout of DEI 2.0. Was that the renewed adversity you were speaking about in your comments?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

No, I don't think so. I would say that, you know, you're absolutely right. I think it was 2023. Is that right? That's right.

And so, 2022 was when I arrived. 2023, as I said earlier today, the fall of 2023 is when the regents and I started really talking about this, about what to do with DEI. And so hopefully that answers your question.

**Paul Renner:**

What was the renewed adversity you were speaking of, if not the reforms taking place, not just in Florida, Texas and other places?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Yeah, I don't think we were referring to Florida or Texas. I don't recall. This has been...I don't remember what I was saying at that time.

**Paul Renner:**

You don't remember. This is your last statement. "We must not back down in the face of renewed adversity." What were you referring to then?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I don't remember because I didn't know I was going to be talking about this document until now.

**Brian Lamb:**

Yeah. So let me, let me comment on that. It's part of the discussions. If we are...have questions for the candidate, that's good. I don't expect...it's not customary that he would then have to figure out documents that have been put in front of him. That's...that is unusual. So, I appreciate your comment, Governor. I appreciate your questions. But like, if there's things that President Ono needs to have, we should have gotten them to him in advance, in fairness. So that would be my ask.

**Charles Lydecker:**

Well, if I could, Mr. Chairman, I would ask that this is, we are here to ratify, up or down, ratify a position that the Board of Trustees at the University of Florida has already taken in unanimous support.

I think the, I think the comments and or some of the questions are fair, but this is not a court of law.

I have, I've been on this board for five, six years and we have never used this as a forum to interrogate. And in this case, it feels to me, patently unfair.

We're interrogating somebody who hasn't had a chance to review the materials in advance. I get the point that he...these are comments and the theory that he would have read the newspaper articles and this is his life. So, of course he should, should know that.

But that's not the way it works in a court of law either. And so, you know, are we a court of law here or are we a body that's intended on ratifying the, one way or another, the vote that has already taken at the University of Florida? But candidly, this process does not feel fair to me.

**Brian Lamb:**

Okay.

**Jose Oliva:**

Mr. Chairman, I have to comment.

**Brian Lamb:**

Okay.

**Jose Oliva:**

If this line of questioning is something that is not sitting well, you really won't like mine. There is an absolute need to understand what this gentleman believes, why he believes it, the things he said and when he said them. You're right, this is not a court of law.

And if we were just here to ratify, someone should make a motion to call the question. But that's not what we're doing. We were asked to listen to him.

(1:41:06 - 1:44:01)

We're listening to him.

**Charles Lydecker:**

You're interrogating him.

**Jose Oliva:**

And that is okay because we are asking someone to lead our flagship university. And so, if someone wants to say, look at something you said and help me understand it, because there's plenty of other things he said that he was allowed to say. You read a great deal of documents about things that were said on his behalf. Why can't someone say there is renewed adversity? What is the renewed adversity? I just, I don't understand where it becomes unfair for someone to sit here-

**Charles Lydecker:**

Governor Oliva, he is asking questions from materials and interrogating him. But I'll just say asking questions from materials he hasn't seen yet. I referenced material.

I didn't ask him a question about it. I'm just saying it's patently unfair for him to be unprepared if this is the approach we're going to take. If we're going to be a quasi-legal body, then I think that's different.

But I don't believe we informed-

**Jose Oliva:**

What should be the nature?

**Charles Lydecker:**

-That that is what we have done.

**Brian Lamb:**

Alright, hold on a second. Now, we're going to have an exchange. That's fair. I fully expected some debate, but we're going to have decorum. And we're probably approaching a bathroom break, if you're me, soon.

But let's finish a little bit of the question. Governor (Lydecker), I appreciate your candid feedback. Governor (Oliva), I always respect your position to ask questions, and we will absolutely come to you. You deserve that. Governor, I'm going to come to you for questions. One of the asks is I want to save time for others. So, if you've got follow ups, we will make time for that. But I...please make time for your other colleagues to ask a set of questions. I think that's a rational and reasonable ask.

So, Governor (Renner), I'm going to come to you. Governor Oliva, I'll come to you next. And I'll come to you next.

**Paul Renner:**

Okay. Thank you. Dr. Ono, please take a look at tab number two, which is an article from the New York Times Magazine in October of 2024. Are you familiar with that article? You referenced it in your testimony to the Board of Trustees last week.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I am.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Is there anything...have you read that? Are you familiar with the article?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I've read it in the past. Yes, not recently.

**Paul Renner:**

Was there anything, when you read it in the past, that you felt was materially incorrect or factually incorrect?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I'll have to think about that because it's a very long article. I don't recall.

**Paul Renner:**

Okay. Yeah. Take a look at tab four. And I want to again lay out the what is the public record and compare that later to your public testimony here today. Take a look at tab four. And this is a document dated November 20th of 2024 from the chair of the Faculty Senate, the University of Michigan to other faculty Senate members. Do you recognize this document?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I haven't looked at it for some time, but it appears to be that that's it's from Rebecca Modrak. Yes.

**Paul Renner:**

And it appears to me, because at the end it has a call to action.

(1:44:02 - 1:44:39)

It asks faculty to come to a December 5th Regents meeting...has one, two, three, four different things that she's asking the faculty to do, one of which at three on the last page says, "Come out and stand up for DEI." The letter also says that you were asked if you wanted to make a statement and include your statement in this letter, which you did. And that is on page two.

And it says, "Thank you for your note. I affirm my staunch support for the core values at the University of Michigan." Now, at this point, President Trump had been elected, correct?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I think so, yes.

(1:44:40 - 1:46:04)

**Paul Renner:**

And those core values, as Governor Levine had stated, included DEI, correct?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

There were a number of this integrity. There's a whole bunch, as is the case in many universities.

**Paul Renner:**

OK, were DEI part of your core values in October of 2024?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I think so. Yeah, I think that hadn't been changed because we changed it in March of 2025.

**Paul Renner:**

Take a look at tab five, please.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Okay.

**Paul Renner:**

And again, I want to lay out the public record. And if there's anything here that you think is inaccurate, you let me know or that you don't recognize. This says "Evolving our approach to DEI and moving forward together."

It has your name, stated March 27th, 2025. Is this your statement announcing the closing of the DEI programs at UM?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

It does look like it is the one it's, I think, signed by myself, the provost, the EVPMA and the executive vice president for chief financial officer. Yes, this is that announcement.

**Paul Renner:**

And you are the author of this.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

We were all authors of it, the whole team.

**Paul Renner:**

But you're listed on here.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I am.

**Paul Renner:**

So, you signed off on what's here.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I am.

**Paul Renner:**

And I see that the only major header that explains the 'why' of shutting it down says...and I'm on page...for the members, I'm on page 2 of that document. It says, "Navigating the national landscape." And it talks at length about the executive orders by President Trump.

(1:46:04 - 1:46:40)

On page 3, it says that federal actions against DEI programming have intensified. And so my question for you, in light of your testimony to the trustees and to us today, is can you point me to anything in this letter in which you express your own personal regret or your evolution concerning DEI, your alleged change in position of in March of this year?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

So, the reason why that's not listed, this is, as you can see, something that's been signed by multiple authors. And what I have represented faithfully is my...the evolution of my own thought.

(1:46:40 - 1:48:21)

**Paul Renner:**

Turn it to tab 6, please. This is dated April 22nd, 2025. It is. Are you familiar with this document?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

This is from the AAC&U.

**Paul Renner:**

Okay. And the AAC&U is the American Association of Colleges and Universities, correct?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Correct.

**Paul Renner:**

And this is a statement that references, "Unprecedented government overreach and political interference now endangering American higher education," and opposes, "Undo government intrusion in the lives of those who learn, live, and work on our campuses." Can you confirm for us that you were a signatory to this letter in April of this year?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

So, this has actually been commented on in the public media. Initially, I did not sign it. I was criticized not for signing it. There was a conversation at the University of Michigan critical of me for not signing it. And I am, if you look at the letter right now, I'm no longer a signatory. So, for a brief time, I signed it, but I have removed my name.

**Paul Renner:**



And if you'll take a look at tab seven, that is the same document with one thing that I can find. There were additional members that were asked to continue signing on. So this was a kind of a rolling, open invitation to members to sign on to this letter. And it says there at the very last page of tab 7, that it was last updated at 5.30 p.m. on May 7, 2025. And if you look at page 17 of that, you will see that your name, as you stated, has been removed.

(1:48:21 - 1:49:14)

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Right.

**Paul Renner:**

Okay. My question then for you, with respect to that, this...this...the removal of your name came after you were announced as a sole finalist at UF, correct?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Yeah. So, the reason why I was criticized for not signing on early was I was really struggling with it. And then, after being announced as sole finalist, I wanted to be in line with the laws and expectations of this body, the Board of Governors and the state of Florida. So yes.

**Paul Renner:**

Did anyone at the University of Florida or affiliated with the University of Florida ask you to remove your name from that statement?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I don't think so, no. It was a personal decision.

**Paul Renner:**

And can you point us to anything in the public record during the year and a half of your evolution, in which you questioned, openly questioned, your prior advocacy for DEI?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I wasn't anticipating the question, so I'll have to think about it and see if I can find that.

(1:49:14 - 1:50:30)

I think probably yes, but I didn't anticipate this question. So...

**Paul Renner:**

A couple more and I'll be done, Chair. You, throughout your career, have repeatedly referenced systemic racism as a reality in America. You've made statements like there's systemic racism in every corner of every university in our country. And, as I understand the proponents of systemic, this idea of systemic racism, it's the idea that it's embedded in society. It's in our history, our culture, like cancer that's metastasized or in the DNA of America.

And so, my question for you, since you've had a longstanding support for that notion and have been an advocate for it, do you believe American society today is systemically racist?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I do not. And I believe that that sort of ideology is divisive. And that's why the reform happening in Florida is attractive to me.

**Paul Renner:**

Prior to your invitation to come to Florida, can you point me to any statement in the public record that evidences that change in position?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Like I said, I'll have to think about that. And I wasn't anticipating the question.

**Paul Renner:**

Thank you, Chair.

**Brian Lamb:**

Okay. Anyone interested in a bathroom break? All right. Me too. Let's take a 10 minute break. Let's catch our breath. We're way behind.

(1:50:31 - 1:50:42)

Governor Oliva, we'll start with you. Then, we need to move around the room quickly. So, 10-minute break, hard stop, back here at three o'clock. Okay. Thank you.

## **MEETING BREAK**

**Brian Lamb:**

I am going to start with Governor Oliva. I'm going to then go quickly to Governor Dunn. We are behind schedule, but for all the right reasons, just quick housekeeping.

(1:50:45 - 1:54:30)

Let's do our very best to ask the pointed questions, have the right debate and discussion. Dr. Ono, if there are things that are in front of you that you don't recognize or haven't had time to review, that is perfectly okay. You're more than welcome to respond to the best of your ability. We are at the Board of Governors. We are not at the Supreme Court. Okay.

With that, I'm going to hand the floor over to Governor Oliva.

**Jose Oliva:**

Thank you, Chairman. Dr. Ono, thank you for being here. Doctor, your recent reversal on an entire architecture of ideology is nothing short of incredible. You've recently stated that you're a scientist and you approach things as a scientist. I'm interested to know, scientifically speaking, what evidence led you to your newfound ideology, but I'm more interested in understanding what science did your decades-long enthusiastic support and advocacy for DEI rest on?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I don't know...Oh, it's (the microphone) working. I didn't know if it was working. Well, thank you so much. You know, as I mentioned, the DEI programs have not been around for very long. At Michigan, the DEI 1.0 program started in 2016, and the DEI 2.0 program, as we've discussed,

occurred...was launched after I arrived in late 2022. So, the previous things that you're talking about were well before that and relatively early in these programs rolling out across North America.

So, there wasn't a lot of data on what the impacts of the DEI programs were. So, my evolution over the past 18 months or more since late 2022 has really focused upon my personal experience seeing the impact that DEI programs that were started with all good intentions, what impact they've had on campuses. And so, if you look at the New York Times article that your colleague shared, it was this very similar kind of analysis asking what's happened to the DEI program at Michigan and came to a very similar sort of conclusion.

So that data is relatively recent and has, I think, mirrors what has been found, not only here in Florida, but at other institutions. So, everyone is kind of evolving, not just me as a scientist, but the sector is evolving, evaluating the impact of these programs launched relatively recently in 2016. And with that, people are changing their views.

There was a recent survey of the University of California and what it found were that many of its faculty actually are saying, you know, what's happening in Florida...Florida's pointed in the right direction, that there have been effects of programs, not everyone being represented, an ideology that's divisive, that everybody has to look at. And so, I wouldn't say I'm unique in any way, but I can tell you really clearly that, based upon my experience, talking to faculty, students getting emails, I truly believe that the principle and vision of the State University System of Florida is the correct one.

**Jose Oliva:**

Well, doctor, the question was, you're a scientist.

(1:54:31 - 1:54:47)

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Yes.

**Jose Oliva:**

On what science did your enthusiastic support and advocacy for DEI rest on?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I'm not an expert in that area. I certainly wasn't the architect of any of these programs.

(1:54:48 - 1:56:53)

They were created by other sorts of people across institutions, across North America. And so, I was waiting to see, since they were new, what the impact would be, like the rest of the world, I would say.

**Jose Oliva:**

Thank you, doctor. Your words simply don't support that, that you were just kind of sailing along and you were waiting to see what would happen. You were very active, in fact, and very involved in these programs.

In fact, when you left the University of British Columbia and you were asked; what was your proudest moment? You didn't bring up any research that was done there. You didn't bring up any scholarship of yours or any product of the university. You said that what you were most proud of

was the task force on anti-racism and inclusive excellence. That's what you were most proud of at a university where now you say people should go learn, not be indoctrinated.

And that task force that you were the most proud of concluded, "Whiteness is an obstacle to achieving inclusive excellence." So, doctor, you're a scientist. If whiteness is an obstacle to achieving something, then the absence of whiteness is what is required to achieve it. Do you believe that there should be an absence of whiteness at the university systems?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**  
Absolutely not.

**Jose Oliva:**

Well, that's interesting because that task force, which you're the most proud of, and you did say you launched, stated that expanding whiteness in strategic hires will not be tolerated. So, they did conclude it. I mean, they stand by the statement. The statement was; there's too much whiteness. That doesn't allow inclusiveness. And the way to solve that is we won't tolerate more whiteness.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**  
Is that a question?

**Jose Oliva:**

Yeah. How do you feel about this statement that was produced by what you are most proud of during your tenure at the University of British Columbia?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**  
This was back then. As I said, I do not stand by that. I do not support that today. And I haven't for about 18 months now.

(1:56:53 - 1:58:27)

**Jose Oliva:**

Sure. But, it speaks to the architecture of one's ideology because now we are made to believe that you have fully abandoned an entire ideological architecture. But it didn't in any way strike you when somebody said that expanding whiteness will not be tolerated or that the absence of whiteness is what's necessary for excellence-

At that moment, that didn't provide you the necessary feedback for you to reject?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**  
Well, I have closed down the DEI program at Michigan and I have sunsetted all the programs because I believe now that that was not correct.

**Jose Oliva:**

Well there were...there were...you know, almost half the country believed it was not correct from the beginning. We hear a lot about how many people did 'what' and how many people supported things. But the truth is, the reason it's gone is because the majority of people never supported it. Because the majority of people, when told that someone should be judged on the color of their skin, rejects it. They don't wait to see the trade winds. They reject it right from there.

You also, during your time in British Columbia, required that the deans of the different schools sign a pledge declaring “Eurocentrism has dominated to the detriment of BIPOC—Black, Indigenous, People of Color—within and beyond the university.” You forced...you made them sign it to say that.

(1:58:27 - 1:59:16)

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I don't recall forcing people to do things, but like I said, I believe currently that that ideology is wrong and it's divisive and I will stand behind fighting it and making sure it does not occur again.

**Jose Oliva:**

Yeah, yeah. But for a very long time, you stood behind promoting it and advancing it. In fact, when we talk about-

**Eric Silagy:**

Governor, I mean, Governor Oliva, could I ask, I mean, you're quoting a lot of this. Are there specific documents that you want to provide to all of us?

**Jose Oliva:**

He's not contesting-

**Eric Silagy:**

No, no, no. I'm saying you're saying he said these things specifically. He was a task force. Are there documents that, because I'm, I mean, because you say it, because I say it, doesn't make it true, right? In a court of law, which this is not, you would have to authenticate before you could even ask the questions.

(1:59:16 - 1:59:26)

**Jose Oliva:**

Sure.

**Eric Silagy:**

Okay, so my only question is...is...are there...is there certain references that we could all look at?

**Jose Oliva:**

Well, none of it is being contested. I suppose if he contests-

**Eric Silagy:**

He just said he doesn't recall, you know, and then he said, well, but then you said this.

(1:59:26 - 1:59:51)

**Jose Oliva:**

No, the only thing he said he doesn't recall is having forced anyone. He didn't.

**Eric Silagy:**

Right.

**Jose Oliva:**

He didn't dispute that there was a declaration that was signed by the deans saying that Eurocentrism-

**Eric Silagy:**

But your statement was that he forced people through this document, apparently, that you're looking at, right? That he forced people to sign on to this. He said he didn't recall, then he said, well, but he did. So...

**Jose Oliva:**

Well, he said he didn't recall. That's his answer.

(1:59:51 - 2:00:06)

**Eric Silagy:**

He said he didn't-

**Jose Oliva:**

What would you like me to provide?

**Eric Silagy:**

-recall. The document that shows that he forced people to sign on.

**Jose Oliva:**

Well, sure. I mean, if you sit and do the research, then sure, I'll provide you whatever all of my research documents are worth.

**Eric Silagy:**

Okay, that'd be great, I'm just saying, if we're going to make-

**Brian Lamb:**

Well, let's do this. Let's do this.

(2:00:06 - 2:00:39)

I appreciate the debate. It's a good debate, but let's move on. We've got a great candidate in front of us having a discussion. So, if you have any other questions for the candidate-

**Jose Oliva:**

Just a couple more questions, Mr. Chairman.

**Brian Lamb:**

And Governor Dunn, I will come to you immediately following, okay?

**Jose Oliva:**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It was also said repeatedly about how you shut down DEI and you did not support DEI 2.0. But sitting with your vice provost and chief diversity officer that you acknowledged earlier, your words exactly, these are on video, Governor Silagy.

(2:00:40 - 2:01:03)

"I am pleased and invigorated by the fact that there are DEI leads throughout the institution. It leads to a strong foundation upon which we must build. But we have much more to do, and it is important to show that I am behind DEI 1.0. But it is also important that when we embark on DEI 2.0, that we do it with even more vigor."

(2:01:04 - 2:01:26)

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

So let me say, that was in the early days, very early in 2022 when I arrived, when I was, as I said, DEI 1.0 was ending and I was presented a DEI 2.0 plan very early in my tenure. And I wanted to be supportive of the institution because I was new. Just like if I were to come to the University of Florida, it would take me time to get my arms around what's going on.

(2:01:27 - 2:04:15)

And I don't want to start off by disrespecting the institution. So, I needed time to get my hands around it.

**Jose Oliva:**

Thank you, doctor. You said just 90 days ago that if you turn on the TV any day, you can see that democracy is under threat locally, nationally, and globally. Now, somewhere in the world, democracy is always under threat because it is not practiced as widely as one would like. But I'm more parochial in nature. I'm interested in locally and nationally. Where, specifically, can you cite that democracy is under threat locally and nationally and that it's visible every day?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I'm happy to tell you, you know, we had an incredible cyber-attack at the University of Michigan. It's well known, well publicized. We have, as UF, I'm sure, thousands of cyber-attacks from other nations, bad actors on a regular basis trying to affect our functions and operations. It happens to banks and casinos as well. So, those are the kinds of threats that are threatening our democracy.

I believe that, as I said in my interview with the UF trustees, that part of the role of an institution, a university, is to develop citizens for the future, to develop future leaders, to become governors and legislatures and senators and congresspersons, to protect what's really fantastic and I'm proud of to be an American.

**Jose Oliva:**

Along those same lines of future leaders, you stated in that same talk that, "We need to do what we can to reach into K-12 schools." Do you believe it is the role of a university to reach down into kindergarten, first, second grade and so on? And if so, how do you see a university doing that?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Thanks for the question. You know, the University of Florida has the number 6 ranked school of education and we, as was the case with Michigan, train future teachers, future superintendents, future principals. As I said, and I'm proud of the University of Florida and the Hamilton School that is really teaching western civilization and the importance of democracy, I think that it's really important for schools, like the University of Florida, to reach into schools to strengthen our democracy.

**Jose Oliva:**

Thank you, doctor. One last question, Mr. Chairman.

**Brian Lamb:**

Okay.

**Jose Oliva:**

You said, several people have stated, you mentioned many times, the existence of systemic racism embedded in every corner of any institution. That's a rather catch-all. I mean, that kind of covers everything, all things. And you said that it is one thing to shine a light on systemic racism.

(2:04:15 - 2:13:07)

It is another thing to change the laws and the behaviors that are behind systemic racism. Can you please specify for us what are the laws that you see that are behind systemic racism?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Well, we have mentioned the previous Supreme Court decisions that were behind affirmative action and the corrective action and reform of the most recent Supreme Court vs. Harvard and UNC decision. And I think the appropriate view that making decisions not on merit is discriminatory.

And so, there's a clear example of a federal law that's ensuring that we have decisions, that there's a fair playing field and decisions based upon merit.

**Jose Oliva:**

So, it is your view, final question, it is your view then that affirmative action was a racist law?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I think it was not fair. It was, I think, originally had good intent. But, I believe that, ultimately, it divided schools and society into different groups and that there were advantages and disadvantages based upon your race or your sexuality, which I think currently, to the core, is wrong.

**Jose Oliva:**

Thank you, Dr. Ono. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**Brian Lamb:**

Okay, Governor Dunn.

**Kimberly Dunn:**

Thank you, Chair Lamb. Hi Dr. Ono. Thank you for being here and thank you for being interested in becoming the next president of our flagship institution.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

You're welcome.

**Kimberly Dunn:**

I also want to thank the trustees at UF and my colleagues here for the very thoughtful questions and for the answers that you've provided because it has given me additional insight into you beyond your very, very impressive vitae.



**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Thank you.

**Kimberly Dunn:**

For someone to have so many academic and administrative accomplishments and still have the humility that you present yourself with is very inspiring. And I also want to say that I truly respect your deliberative, thoughtful decision-making processes and understanding that things don't always shift immediately, but over time.

So, thank you for helping us understand that more.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Thank you.

**Kimberly Dunn:**

My question for you is, can you talk more about your views on the role of faculty and how you would collaborate with faculty in continuing UF's rise to being the top public university in the nation?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Thank you very much. As you probably know, I still try to serve as a faculty member. I teach in different schools at every institution I've led and I still try to do research. I published a couple of papers, even the past a year and a half, that I'm pretty proud of.

And the reason why I do that, to answer your question, is that the faculty are at the core of everything at an institution. The faculty teach. The faculty create a new knowledge. The faculty inspire current students. Faculty, as Chair Hosseini has said in the most recent Board of Trustees meeting, deserve our support. And I think that's one thing I bring to not only the university but to the system is that I'm a card-carrying member who has gone through the promotion tenure process and have, you know, have progressed through the ranks.

I'm a faculty member and I think that perspective is incredibly important to bring to the table when I interact with the Board of Trustees of the University of Florida. And the second part of the question is, what I think what I do to support faculty. Chair Hosseini and I have already talked about that. We have to do everything we can to support the faculty that are innovating in those core missions. Scholarship, teaching, research. We need to reward and retain faculty because they are the heart of the institution.

There would be no university without faculty.

**Kimberly Dunn:**

Thank you.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

You're welcome.

**Brian Lamb:**

Okay, thank you. And by the way, welcome (Governor Dunn) to your first meeting, quite the inauguration. If, in fact, can you take 30 seconds and just for the Board, introduce yourself.

**Kimberly Dunn:**

My name is Kim Dunn. I've been on the faculty at Florida Atlantic University since 2001. I have, the past two years, I was the Advisory Council of Faculty Senate's Vice Chair to just outgoing Governor Phalin. And my home department is the School of Accounting in the College of Business.

**Brian Lamb:**

Excellent.

Charles Lydecker:

I would like to acknowledge that, one, welcome, but two, she has big shoes to fill.

**Brian Lamb:**

Absolutely.

**Charles Lydecker:**

Governor Phalin, I think, did a remarkable job while she was on the Board of Governors. So, thank you and welcome.

**Brian Lamb:**

Well said, my friend. Well said. And as a recovering accountant, welcome. And Carson, I did not pause up front to welcome you as well as our newest addition to the Board of Governors, particularly in your position as representing all 400,000+ of our students. So, do you mind taking a quick second to introduce yourself?

**Carson Dale:**

Is this on? Okay. Yeah, I'd be happy to. My name is Carson Dale. I'm an incoming Senior at FSU where I serve as Student Body President. Just this past week, I was elected as the Chair of the Florida Students Association. So, I have the honor of representing the 400,000+ students here in Florida and I look forward to working with you all this year.

**Brian Lamb:**

It's great to have you-

**Carson Good:**

-and a truly awesome name.

**Brian Lamb:**

It's a great name. It's a pretty good name. Governor Silagy, I know you had your hand up. I'll come to you next.

**Eric Silagy:**

Great. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you, Dr. Ono, for being here today.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Thank you.

**Eric Silagy:**

I only have a few questions. So, earlier, if I heard you correctly, you committed to upholding all federal and state laws, correct?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Correct.

**Eric Silagy:**

Okay. And you believe the University President is bound to uphold federal state laws as promulgated, correct?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

100% and that's why I've encouraged it to be noted in my contract.

**Eric Silagy:**

And do you believe the University President should also uphold all regulations that are put in place by other relevant governing bodies, such as Board of Trustees or, in this case, the Florida Board of Governors?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Absolutely. I mean, I'm looking forward to working with the Board of Trustees and I've read your strategic plan of State University System. I've read the 2022 commitment on civil discourse. It's pioneering work that the nation needs to, I think, in many ways, follow. And so, I'll enthusiastically support this body.

**Eric Silagy:**

Great. And as you're, during your tenure in Michigan, did you uphold all federal state laws as well as regulations required by the Board of Trustees?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I did.

**Eric Silagy:**

Okay. Are you familiar with the Board of Governors Regulation 2.003 entitled "Equity and Access?"

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I'm not. I'm sorry. I'm kind of new.

**Eric Silagy:**

Well, that was, that was actually a regulation that was passed in September of 2010 that created, actually, DEI programs and required them in all of our universities after consultation with state lawmakers, I presume, as well as looking at any kind of federal regulations that would come to bear.

And that has been in place for...it was in place for 13 years. It was actually, and Governor Lydecker spoke about this, it was actually reviewed by the Board of Governors in its entirety in September of 2020 and amended slightly to ensure that there was actually prompt reporting of the university's

actions on an annual basis so the Board of Governors could then report to the state legislature, which it had been bound to do every year, to inform it of the progress that was being made.

Specifically, this rule establishes a designated office or person responsible for development and implementation of the Equal Employment Opportunities Program at each university.

It goes on to say it requires the maintenance of an annual equity plan for remedying underutilization of women and minorities as applicable in senior-level administrative positions and by faculty rank and or tenure status. Such plan shall be maintained and ongoing until such underutilization has been remedied.

And then among other provisions, it requires the Board of Governors shall annually assess the progress of each university's plan and advise the Board of Governors and the legislature regarding compliance.

(2:13:09 - 2:13:38)

And then finally, each university shall develop a budget plan to support attainment of university's goals as outlined in the equity plan in accordance with state and federal law. So, this was in plan, you actually referenced Michigan only put DEI in place in 2016, Florida actually put it in 2010. And then every year, this body and most people on this Board of Governors, we reported every year on the progress that universities were making.

(2:13:39 - 2:14:26)

If you were...and then it was amended two years ago to reflect changes in state law and thinking, so clearly Florida evolved. So, my question to you is, if you are selected as the next University of Florida president, would you uphold then the revised and evolved regulation of the Board of Governors 2.003, what's the new thinking in Florida about DEI?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I view that all the presidents of all the institutions in the state university system have an obligation to support the decisions of the Board of Governors. What you have described happened everywhere, in British Columbia, in the state of Michigan, with Prop 2, actually that's been mentioned, actually denying affirmative action.

(2:14:27 - 2:14:43)

The University of Michigan followed the laws of the state of Michigan. The University of British Columbia followed the laws. And in Ohio, as you know, Governor DeWine has actually passed new legislation with the legislature condemning and dismantling DEI.

(2:14:43 - 2:18:38)

That was different from what it had held for the longest period of time. That happened very recently. This evolution is happening across the whole continent.

And to answer your question, I have a responsibility to the state, to this Board of Governors, to support all of the laws that are put forward by this Board and by the state, and I will do so.

**Eric Silagy:**

Thank you. Only a few more questions, Mr. Chair, and then I'll wrap it up. This is actually for Chairman Hosseini. Chair Hosseini, are you satisfied with the robust nature and the due diligence that was done by the search committee for University of Florida for this search?

**Mori Hosseini:**

Absolutely. I am satisfied. I did my own homework. This is such a heartbreaking because, Governor Silagy, if this Board looks at every president that right now in the state of Florida, look at their past, look at their past, they will find something.

You said 2010. If you look at the minutes of 2020 of Board of Governors, it talks about social justice. Look at those minutes. If you look at that, you can come ask questions of, what about this? The moral of the story is that if we didn't give President Reagan, that was a Democrat, a staunch Democrat, and a...representing unions, became a Republican, if you didn't give him a break, if we didn't believe in what he said, the thing is that you have a backstop.

You have a Board of Trustees that have proven who said that, you know, I mean, everything at the University of Florida. I disagree with Governor Levine that President Sasse made the decision. I was there. I was there, Governor. I'm the one at the Board that welcomed all of our Jewish students on behalf of our Board, and we never gave a break to those people that would put their foot, you know, outside what was allowed. Never.

So, the Board of Trustees are there as a backstop. If this man doesn't do what he says he's going to do, we're there. Wear your boots on the ground.

That is the basics of and basis of this Board of Governors that we have all served, and yet you all decided today is the day. We're going to take somebody down.

**Eric Silagy:**

So, Chair Hosseini, let me ask you. I believe I heard, and it might have been from Governor Lydecker, but that this was a process that attracted a lot of interest from candidates from around the country and presumably here in Florida. Is that true?

**Mori Hosseini:**

Yes, that's correct.

**Eric Silagy:**

And so, and there have been a number of detractors in this process who...some of whom may have expressed an interest for the President's, for being in a position of actually gaining the Presidency of the University of Florida. Is that true?

**Mori Hosseini:**

Yes, some people applied.

**Eric Silagy:**

So, they would benefit then, presumably, if Dr. Ono was not selected and we'd have to start this process back over and the search committee would start the process over and people would be reconsidered. Is that correct?

**Mori Hosseini:**

I'm assuming that they apply one again, yes.

(2:18:38 - 2:18:49)

**Eric Silagy:**

Okay. And were there people in Florida who expressed their interest in this role?

**Mori Hosseini:**

In the State of Florida?

**Eric Silagy:**

Yes, in the State of Florida?

**Mori Hosseini:**

Yeah, they were all from the State of Florida. I didn't have anybody outside the State of Florida.

(2:18:50 - 2:19:00)

**Eric Silagy:**

Okay. Are there any folks who are currently serving on the Board of Governors who will be voting on this who expressed an interest?

**Mori Hosseini:**

Yes.

**Eric Silagy:**

Currently?

**Mori Hosseini:**

Yes.

(2:19:02 - 2:19:32)

**Eric Silagy:**

Okay.

**Charles Lydecker:**

This Board of Governors? Now?

**Mori Hosseini:**

Yes.

**Charles Lydecker:**

Am I allowed to ask who or is that not allowed to be known?

**Mori Hosseini:**

You ask, I will answer. I'm not going to...

**Charles Lydecker:**

Who on the Board of Governors wanted to be President of the University of Florida?

**Mori Hosseini:**

Paul Renner.

**Paul Renner:**

I'd like to respond. May I respond? Let me just, let me make real clear, Governors, that if there's a vacancy or I have no intention of serving in the University of Florida.

(2:19:33 - 2:19:40)

I was asked by a trustee at the University of Florida to speak to the chair, which I did. And he said he wasn't interested. And that's it.

(2:19:40 - 2:19:52)

If it were offered, I'm telling you on the record that I would reject that. You understand?

**Mori Hosseini:**

But from that day, has never talked to me. I did that out of care for him.

(2:19:53 - 2:20:05)

**Paul Renner:**

No, no, no. I did not initiate that. Excuse me. I'm going to defend myself here. I did not ask and initiate that conversation. I was asked by a trustee of the University of Florida.

(2:20:05 - 2:20:22)

I contacted the governor's office. I was told to go talk to Mori Hosseini. And he said he wasn't interested. And that's the end of it. And I'm telling you, Governor Lydecker and Governor Silagy, if offered, I have no intention because I'm now on the Board of Governors. This conversation did not take place while I was on the Board of Governors.

(2:20:23 - 2:20:31)

**Charles Lydecker:**

Okay-

**Paul Renner:**

You understand that? No, no, no. But the timeline is important because this is all about timeline. I was asked to go initiate a conversation, which I did.

(2:20:31 - 2:20:39)

I did not say I want to be on the University of Florida...the University of Florida president. I was asked to go do that. And I did that before I was on the Board of Governors.

(2:20:40 - 2:20:55)

And because I'm on the Board of Governors—Can I get my microphone back--because I'm on the Board of Governors. That would be a conflict in my opinion. And under no circumstances, just so we're crystal clear, would I serve at this time at the University of Florida, period.

(2:20:55 - 2:21:04)

**Eric Silagy:**

Are you planning on recusing this vote?

**Paul Renner:**

Why would I do that?

**Tim Cerio:**

I think we need to be really careful about getting into ethics questions. If we're going to talk about certain members of this board.

**Eric Silagy:**

Because it could be viewed as a conflict.

(2:21:04 - 2:21:13)

**Paul Renner:**

What's that?

**Eric Silagy:**

That's all.

**Brian Lamb:**

All right, so let's pause. Hold on. Let's catch our breath. I appreciate everyone clear in the air. I got to get us back on track.

(2:21:13 - 2:21:32)

That's fine. I got to get us back on track.

**Eric Silagy:**

So, anybody else from Florida and from a standpoint of in a position of authority to be able to...who would express an interest? Anybody else in that has been trying to influence the process through public comments?

**Mori Hosseini:**

Yes, others have, but not to influence the decision making.

(2:21:32 - 2:21:36)

**Eric Silagy:**

Okay, that's the end of my question.

**Brian Lamb:**

All right, thank you. I'm going to pause.

(2:21:38 - 2:21:55)

Dr. Ono, did you have something?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Because of this line of questions, I just wanted to say that I was approached by the University of Florida when I was at the University of Michigan. And to be very, very clear, I'm very enthusiastic about this goal. I hope it shows through.



(2:21:55 - 2:22:08)

I think it's an incredible institution. And I hope you've heard that I think that this system is pioneering. And I'm here because I want to join you and move this system and this university in the same direction. I just wanted to say that.

(2:22:08 - 2:22:11)

**Brian Lamb:**

Thank you. Thank you. Very well said.

(2:22:12 - 2:22:21)

Okay, here's what we're going to do. I haven't gotten to everyone and I want to make sure I do that. And so, Governor Haddock, I see your hand up.

(2:22:22 - 2:22:27)

Governor Edge, you had a question. So, I would ask...

**Tim Cerio:**

Same here.

**Brian Lamb:**

Okay, I'm sorry.

(2:22:28 - 2:22:43)

Governor Cerio. So, Governor Haddock, if I could, it may be painful, but could I limit you to one question, maybe a follow-up if needed? Governor Edge, then Governor Cerio. Is that reasonable?

**Tim Cerio:**

I've got several, but they're very crisp and they're one answer, one sentence.

(2:22:43 - 2:22:47)

**Brian Lamb:**

Okay, thank you. Governor Haddock.

**Edward Haddock:**

Me?

**Brian Lamb:**

Yes, sir.

(2:22:48 - 2:22:57)

**Edward Haddock:**

Okay, maybe you don't want to hear. I don't have a question. I could not imagine a valid question that hadn't been asked at least three times.

(2:22:59 - 2:23:44)

Over the weekend, I spent 3 hours listening very carefully to the tape...the videotape of the board meeting at University of Florida. And if you guys think this is the only place he's been grilled, you're wrong, because in that meeting, he got grilled for about 2 hours. And not only was I left with the

impression that he was probably the most qualified candidate I'd ever listened to in education, but I couldn't even imagine how his patience, how his balance, how everything was so well done.

(2:23:44 - 2:24:28)

And anyway, in the whole process, and you may think since the board unanimously hired him subject to our approval, that they weren't careful about it. And I thought, for the first half of the proceeding, that everybody was against him because of the questions they asked and the way it went. But I think the point I'd like to make that I wonder if we're not missing it; when the idea of equity or diversity, equity of inclusion came up, a lot of us like me probably said, well, I don't know what that's about.

(2:24:28 - 2:24:50)

I think I understand those principles, but I believe in them. I don't know if we need to do anything special with it, but we did. And I think a lot of people got on board because, you know, who is against diversity? Who is against equity? Who's against inclusion? But it became an institution.

(2:24:50 - 2:25:09)

It became...got a life of its own. And it got loaded up with baggage. And it ended up being oppressive and intrusive and inefficient and getting in the way of the very things that its name implied.

(2:25:09 - 2:25:36)

It was getting in the way of equity. Because when we pushed diversity so far, it wasn't equal anymore because somebody that wasn't different didn't get included. And when we pushed equity too far, it was because we helped out somebody, but we also ruled out somebody else because we were unequal.

(2:25:37 - 2:26:05)

And inclusion doesn't mean that without qualifications, you open the door to anybody. So, I think a lot of people, like me, really were relieved and appreciative when in Florida, we got the political leadership to stand up to that. And it started a change throughout the whole country.

(2:26:06 - 2:26:35)

And it's all changed, but it changed fast. Two years ago, it was almost the law of the land to obey diversity, equity, and inclusion, whether you liked it or not. And so, if you were the university president of a respected university and you were against diversity, equity, and inclusion, you were going basically against the law of our society, whether you liked it or not.

(2:26:36 - 2:27:00)

And then we've reached the point where we've thrown out that institutionalized creature that became something nobody ever intended. But we didn't get rid of diversity because we all still believe in that. And we didn't get rid of equity because we all still believe in that.

(2:27:00 - 2:27:17)

And we didn't get rid of inclusion because we all still believe in that. In fact, if you could think of three things this nation is founded on, those are the three things. That's what America is all about, but it's based on it all equally.

(2:27:18 - 2:27:55)

And it doesn't mean everybody is in the same place either, but it means everybody has an equal opportunity. And just because somebody ends up again ahead of somebody else doesn't mean you make up for it, but the opportunity should be there. And so, if you're the president of a university and you have changed like that precipitously over three to two years and you've got thousands of people with different views and a lot of them are scared to death that now they can't be equal.

(2:27:56 - 2:28:18)

Now they can't be included because they're diverse. And so, you have to remind them that just because we got rid of the institutional DEI, we didn't get rid of equity. We still believe in equity and we didn't get rid of diversity.

(2:28:19 - 2:28:57)

We still believe in that. We're not against diversity and we're not against inclusion. And so, if I were president of a university, I'm confident that as recently as last month, if I was making a presentation, you might find in that that I was telling people we believe in equity and as part of our core values and that we believe in diversity and as part of our core values and we believe in inclusion as part of our core values because we're Americans and it's part of America's core values.

(2:28:57 - 2:29:55)

So, I think that we sort of get off base when we start going through transcripts of something that Dr. Ono has said and we find the word diversity or we find the word equity and then we don't trust him anymore because we think that he still believes in that old concept of DEI that got institutionalized and that we threw out. Thank goodness. So I just think there's some confusion about that that we ought to be careful with because I actually think that the balance that that indicates is something that we want as a president of our University of Florida and I don't think he could do a good job if he didn't have that belief in those values and by the way he doesn't have a reputation as a liar.

(2:29:57 - 2:30:23)

There hasn't been a single thing that's been held out to him that he's denied but he's explained his intent and I think that I feel like we...well, I won't go beyond that but anyway those are some thoughts I think we should share.

**Brian Lamb:**

Thank you, governor.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Mr. Chair, can I just respond real quick? Mr. Chair.

(2:30:24 - 2:30:34)

**Brian Lamb:**

Oh, yes, Dr. Ono and then I'll come here to Governor Edge and then Governor Cerio.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I just wanted to thank you for that. I couldn't have said it better sir from what you said.

(2:30:35 - 2:30:48)

Thank you for that those comments and I just want to say this is not just in higher education. Fortune 500 companies had chief diversity officers. They've changed over the past several months.

(2:30:49 - 2:31:06)

Kathy White, the chair of the board of regents at the University of Michigan is a brigadier general. She was a chief diversity officer in the military relatively recently; she changed and so all of us in this past few years has been a seismic change.

(2:31:06 - 2:31:34)

All of us have been in leadership period positions during the period of time whether you're in the military, fortune 500 company, universities have had to navigate this and what I'm saying to you is that I believe that the direction of Florida is the right one and I will uphold the laws of this state and I will make sure that the institution's leadership role in merit-based decisions continues.

**Brian Lamb:**

Thank you. Governor Edge and then Governor Cerio.

(2:31:34 - 2:32:02)

**Aubrey Edge:**

So, Dr. Ono, I just have one question and then I have a comment. My question is, as a man of science, which you are very pedigreed and very talented, what are your views on gender?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

There are two sexes, male and female.

**Aubrey Edge:**

And would you say--okay two questions--and would you say that evolved as well over time?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

No, I've always thought there are two sexes: male and female.

(2:32:03 - 2:34:30)

Yeah, this is a different question about sexuality but there are two genders.

**Aubrey Edge:**

Okay, because I'd read an article about your British Columbia days where it seemed you embraced something different than that.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I wouldn't say I embraced that. I recognize that there are people that have a variety of views in terms of their sexuality but there are two genders.

**Aubrey Edge:**

Sure. So, I want to say, first of all, very talented guy, also a very personable guy. Enjoyed speaking with you in the break. So, I'm going to say something a little different and sum it up a little differently from my perspective. You've had a lot of what seems to be long-held principles and then 18 months ago they kind of all changed, which is fine.

People can change. And then when you were answering why, and I'm just going to quote a few, you said, "It was a scary time," "It wasn't an easy time.," even someone else put my name to those particular words. And so, for me, the problem is that's not leadership. You know, true leadership is really standing up for principles no matter what the environment is and making sure that those views are heard and that they cascade down.

(2:33:22 - 2:33:38)

And to me, that's what true leadership is. So with that-

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Can I answer that?

**Aubrey Edge:**

Sure.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

So, taking the decision to close the DEI offices and the program at the University of Michigan was not easy. And I would submit that that is a clear example of leadership. The other thing that you may or may not be aware of was that I was asked to sign an op-ed to the New York Times saying that I would defy the Trump administration. It's in the public domain. If you look up "Finley Detroit News," you'll see it. And I refused to sign that, even with considerable pressure. And so, I am capable of making tough decisions of leading. Those are two examples. And I am ready to do so at the University of Florida. Okay.

**Brian Lamb:**

Thank you, Governor Serio. And then I'm going to go to Governor Ken Jones. We're coming in for a landing here. So-

**Tim Cerio:**

All right.

**Brian Lamb:**

What was yours?

**Tim Cerio:**

Thank you, Mr. Chair. First, Governor Lydecker, thank you for acknowledging that I did serve with you on the search committee.

(2:34:31 - 2:35:49)

It was hard work. I want to thank Chair Hosseini for appointing me. And I know he worked very hard on it from beginning to end. He worked very closely with Chair Patel and didn't abandon him to do all the work by himself. And I think that's important. And I want to sort of amplify what Governor Haddock was talking about for the public as well.

There's a reason why all these questions are happening. When you have the process that over the last couple of years was changed by the legislature to allow confidentiality, to allow some exclusions from the Sunshine Law and Public Records Law in a limited fashion so you could have a

better pool of applicants, there is a tradeoff. The tradeoff is that 21-day cooling off period from the time the committee makes its selection to the time the trustees vote.

And there was a lot of new information that came out, a lot of things, there was new spins. And I will tell you, some of it, and I'm not saying it's unfair, some of it, you know, there's a lot of folks on both sides that came out of the woodwork and doctor, you're in the position of having to respond to that.

But that's where we are. And so that's, and I know you understand that going in. So, a lot of, so the problem is, as you have an evolved...you've evolved your position on many things.

(2:35:49 - 2:36:16)

Typically, when we're hiring a president, we go on the body of work. What's their track record? And so, because we have to, you know, there has been this change, we have to...the bottom line is we have to figure out, do you mean it? Are you telling the truth or is this an opportunity to pivot and get a job? And I don't think that's unfair on our part. So, it is not meant to harass you or in any way be unfair, but they are tough questions.

(2:36:16 - 2:48:45)

And these are some questions that I just, I want to clarify the timeline for my own edification and I want to understand. So just very quickly, Chair Lamb, I'll move through this.

The statement, the DEI one year, the DEI 2.0, 1 year progress report came out in October of 24. And there's a, there's a very positive statement about your commitment to DEI, but you said your position had been evolving. So, can you, can you explain that for me? Because I think you said the very next month is when it was pretty definitive that you were going to roll it back.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

So, before October 24, the Regents and I were talking about the DEI program in general. Like I said, in 2022, I decided not to increase the budget as we evaluated things. We started talking about everything in October 2022, moving forward, things were happening in Florida. And then in June of 2024, that's when a committee was structured to assess diversity statements, DEI statements.

It was in November, about a month after what you're talking about, where the diversity statements were actually no longer...they were discontinued. And so, you can see the whole process is taking place during that period of time. There is a comment on October 24, but in November, you can see that we, through the process, we made a decision to, to stop DEI statements.

If you look in the fall, in the fall and winter of that time, before the announcement 25, we were, we had already pretty much decided that we were going to discontinue the DEI offices and, and close the entire program. It was announced in March because it took quite a bit of time to have those conversations with the Board. So, that whole period of time, everything was being considered. Absolutely.

**Tim Cerio:**

So, was the October sort of endorsement of DEI was just, was it a statement that had been in the works for the progress report?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Yes, yes.

**Time Cerio:**

Okay. On the...we've talked a lot about the antisemitism question. And again, there was a quote that was thrown out where, you know, I think it was, you talked about the government could call me tomorrow and say, in a very unbalanced way, the university is not doing enough to, to combat antisemitism. And I could say it's not doing enough to combat Islamophobia.

We covered that. You said in your interview with the trustees, antisemitism is, is not one form of hatred. It is uniquely virulent and, and persistent and a persistent threat on college campuses.

(2:38:46 - 2:39:09)

What made that change? Was it October 7th? When did that crystallize for you and why?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I think antisemitism is one of the oldest vices, racisms that have existed. As you've heard previously, I've been working with Hillel's and Jewish communities at every institution I have led well before October 7th. October 7th was a horrific situation.

(2:39:10 - 2:39:40)

I sent out an all-campus email saying so, condemning it. I would say that in the, the commentary about Islamophobia, that's because a student, a couple of students had been doxed who were Muslim. And so, I wanted to acknowledge that although the predominant situation occurring most of the cases, Title VI cases were antisemitism, that there are also a couple of students that were of MENA origin that also experienced harassment as well.

(2:39:41 - 2:39:58)

But I can say very clearly that the predominant situation we have to deal with on college campuses is antisemitism, as I said to the UF Board of Trustees.

**Tim Cerio:**

Okay. So, Governor Silagy asked you about your enforcement of laws, rules, and regs in Michigan.

(2:39:59 - 2:41:49)

This is not a gotcha question. I think it's a very fair one. Weren't the encampments and weren't the, you know, taking over office buildings, wasn't that a violation of the existing, you know, not only free speech, but student conduct policies?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Certainly was. And I wish that I would have acted more, more quickly. It was a very difficult time. As I said, when you turn on the television, these were violent situations.

We, for safety reasons, we wanted to make sure that we could move to remove the encampment in an efficient and safe way. So yes, and after that, there's been no further encampment. We also had to clarify and create new components of student conduct, which we did, and that's in the public domain.

So, we put all that into place and has had a very positive impact on the community experience and safety. And, you know, a number of leaders of Michigan's Hillel, as well as the ADL and the AJC and students have really said that they appreciate the decisiveness of those actions. But yes, I wish I could have been even more quickly, but it was not easy.

**Tim Cerio:**

And it wasn't easy because of just the campus climate and demographics. Is that-

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I don't know if you remember what was happening with Columbia and-

**Tim Cerio:**

Oh, yeah.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

-the multiple attempts to remove the encampment and it came back. And for me, the hardest thing was when you looked at UCLA and three hours, there wasn't sufficient security and police there to make sure that they could maintain decorum.

We had to make decisions to introduce all that so that we could reach the stage where we are now.

Over the past year, and you can talk to the ADL, our grade improved to two grades. One of the biggest increases during that period of time is because we made those decisions.

(2:41:49 - 2:42:12)

**Tim Cerio:**

Was it an F before? It was and it became a C. Why did it take 30 days?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Like I said, we were worried about what we were seeing on television. We wanted to make sure that we could execute in a way without any impact on safety for those in the community.

**Tim Cerio:**

You had said earlier, and I don't want to be unfair, so correct me if this is a misstatement.

(2:42:12 - 2:42:23)

You seem to refute the idea that some previously held statements that systemic racism is everywhere. I thought you said that you no longer subscribe to the concept of systemic racism.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Correct.

(2:42:23 - 2:43:03)

**Tim Cerio:**

What changed your mind and when?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I think systemic racism divides the institution into groups of people, and I have decided, over this period of time, that that's counterproductive, that we have to think about the entire community of



all members of a university community and not put them in different categories that doesn't result in the inclusiveness that we all seek.

**Tim Cerio:**

Last question, Mr. Chair. Doctor, is the climate crisis still the existential challenge of our time, as you said in your University of Michigan inaugural address?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I think I mentioned it in my opening remarks.

(2:43:03 - 2:45:50)

I think it's the responsibility of an institution to do the kind of science, to share that science and research with the state and federal government. It is my view that it's inappropriate for me to make statements like that, and I will not make statements like that moving forward. That's why we went through a process of developing an institutional neutrality statement, as is embraced by many other institutions.

Why not now? I do not believe that, nor will I say that moving forward. But why don't you believe it now? Because I think that there's a lot of innovations in science, things like carbon capture, things like that, that weren't really an alternative forms of energy. There are lots of solutions.

And I think that what I said at that time didn't benefit from the data that we have now scientifically.

**Tim Cerio:**

That's very good news. Thank you, Doctor.

**Brian Lamb:**

Okay. Governor Jones, you have one question, and then I'm going to come back into the room. But Governor Jones, the floor is yours.

**Ken Jones:**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm not going to repeat or ask a lot of questions, but I think Governor Haddock pointed out every interesting, relevant question has probably already been asked, but maybe one hasn't. And I apologize, I'm not there in person today. I was at a state pension board meeting and couldn't be there in person.

But, Dr. Ono, look, I appreciate you speaking with me, and I enjoyed our conversation. The question that I've got for you is a lot has been made about the contract that you're going to sign. I think you might have brought it up, and I think other board members have brought it up, that you will stick to the beliefs that you talked about today and things that you've talked about in the Board of Trustees meeting, partly because you believe them, because that's what you've said, but also partly because you've got a contract that will have some unusual provisions in it that will hold you to account for all the things that you've said during this search process.

So, my question is two parts. One, do you think that that type of a contract is going to impair your ability to be a comprehensive leader, because you're always going to be thinking about, you know, what did I sign as a contract that allows me to govern as the president at the University of Florida?

Do you think that will impact your ability to lead?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I think not, because I believe in what's behind all of those commitments. That's why I made a point to say them in my opening statement. I believe in being held accountable, whoever you are, and I owe it to you because you've asked these questions and you need to know that I will abide by the board of governors, different policies and principles, and the state and the Floridians. I think it's perfectly appropriate for me to make those commitments and be held accountable, and I'd be happy to sign those.

(2:45:51 - 2:46:33)

So, I don't think it will impact or impair my ability to lead because I believe at the very core in what's behind those.

**Brian Lamb:**

Okay-

**Ken Jones:**

The second part to the same question is, if you're confirmed today, you, yourself, as a leader are going to go on a search process, most likely to pick other deans, other provosts and senior leadership within the university. Would you feel comfortable finding candidates for those roles that you believe didn't have the same core beliefs that you think are needed to govern effectively and take the University of Florida, I think you put it as a rocket ship to continue to let it go.

(2:46:33 - 2:47:34)

Would you feel comfortable hiring somebody that you didn't feel had those same core beliefs, but that you had to get them to have those core beliefs by getting them to sign a contract? Do you think that those are things that will, again, impair your ability to pick good leadership? Because if you are picked today and you're confirmed today, we're not only confirming you as the president of the University of Florida, we're empowering you to go demonstrate leadership, to go pick other leaders within the system. And so, would you feel comfortable picking leaders that in your mind maybe don't have exactly what you're looking for, but you would hold them accountable through a contract mechanism by putting some hooks in it, if you will, so that they stayed in line with the beliefs that you have as a leader at the University of Florida?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I'll say it would be a both and, if that makes any sense. I think part of my responsibility to this board and to the state is to honor the commitments that I have made.

(2:47:35 - 2:53:26)

And I've said on TV and to you, you've all heard it. And part of that responsibility is choosing a leadership team together with the chair and the vice chair that will ensure that those commitments, those values, the principles that we've been talking about are not only supported by me, but supported by those that I hire as well-

**Ken Jones:**

And I'm sorry to interrupt, but just because time is short, but would you want to get them there by having a legal contract to make them get there? Or would you want them to just congenitally,

innately have those things in their leadership skills and repertoire and backgrounds, that they're already there, is my question.

Would you want to have to get them there through a contract? Or do you want to pick leaders that you feel are already there from a philosophy and a policy standpoint?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Ideally, they would be already there. And I would look for those sorts of individuals. You know, I haven't really thought about contracts for people yet at the University of Florida. I'm perfectly happy to sign it myself because I'm committed, as I've said, on the record. I'd want to talk to the general counsel of the university. I'd want to talk to the chair about that.

But I would certainly endeavor to find people that will actually continue to elevate the University of Florida, world class, as you and I have talked about. I will definitely look for people like that that will be aligned with our vision. It's not just the board's vision or the state's, but it's my vision, too.

You know, I have said that I will be supportive of those commitments. I will look for, and I think there are great leaders that are attracted to the University of Florida. If you look at the Hamilton School, scores of world class scientists that are in alignment with the vision of meritocracy in higher education have been recruited from Ivy League schools, from Oxford and Cambridge.

And so, yes, I believe we can find those people. And, you know, I haven't thought much about what their contract is going to look like, to be frank.

**Ken Jones:**

No, I appreciate your taking the time to talk to us today. Mr. Chairman, back to you.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Thank you, Ken.

**Brian Lamb:**

Governor Jones, thank you. I want to...while I'm on the Zoom, anyone else on the Zoom? Governor Bell Barnett, thank you for joining. Governor Diaz, Governor Frost. Let me just pause. Anybody on Zoom?

**Patricia Frost:**

I'm ready to vote.

**Brian Lamb:**

That's a good answer, Governor Frost. OK, give me five more minutes. I'm going to try to get us there, literally.

**Charles Lyrdecker:**

I'd like to make an observation.

**Brian Lamb:**

I'll come to Governor Lydecker, then come to Governor Good and Governor Dale for questions.

**Charles Lydecker:**

I just want to affirm in the board books, there's a copy of the document or the contract that the University of Florida Board of Trustees has made available for us to view, and a lot of the commitments that have been reiterated today are codified in that employment and contract.

I also want to say that I do get, a couple of my fellow governors, I do get the concern that you raise, either on DEI or other issues, and wanting to test the veracity of what Dr. Ono is saying and making sure that, or trying to determine, if it is something that's in his DNA or is not in his DNA, what does a conversion look like? How do we define evolution? And I want you to know, I do respect those views. I will say, I don't think it's fair to interrogate him, but I do understand that.

But in my case, I think this is a person, and I thought this through the search process, is a person who has conducted himself and lived his life in a manner of integrity. And I choose to believe where he is right now. One of the things that Chair Hosseini referenced earlier in the back and forth is that, look, the search committee previously bet on an alternative candidate the last time.

And they were very vested in an alternative candidate. And President Sasse, for whatever reasons, didn't work out, and they took action, and they moved. And because they're so deeply committed to making the University of Florida number one in the country, which is what we're about.

And so, I have no doubt-

**Brian Lamb:**

Governor Lydecker, I love where you're going. You're like right into the discussion phase, partner. But I want to make sure I get a couple of questions. I promise during discussion, I'm going to come back to you. Got my commitment. I promise. Governor Good, question. Governor Dale, question. And then I am actually going to call the motion. But I'm going to come to you two first for questions for Dr. Ono. Carson's going to go first. Carson, the floor is yours.

**Carson Dale:**

Awesome. Dr. Ono, thank you for being here today. I've talked to a lot of University of Florida students who are very excited about the potential for you to serve at the University of Florida. I just wanted to ask how you're going to involve students in decision-making over this next year, next five years, if you were to be appointed to this position, and how you will make sure that they have a voice at the table.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Well, thank you so much. I'm excited about interacting with them as well. And, you know, I plan to interact in a variety of ways with student leadership directly. I hope they'll have opportunities for me to interact with them, talk to me about some of their priorities.

(2:53:26 - 2:53:46)

They're excited...what they're enthusiastic about and what they're concerned about, so I can work on their behalf. I think it's important for the leadership team, the cabinet of the university, to periodically meet with the leadership of the students. It works really well, even better than just the president to the president, to have the teams coming together.

(2:53:47 - 2:55:24)

You know, University of Florida is a very organized, strategic place, so I anticipate the students have priorities. I look forward to reading those, to having discussions, to meeting on a regular basis with the leadership. I, at Michigan, met with both the president and the vice president.

We had a celebration at the end of the academic year between the leadership team and the student leaders at the university. I've done that pretty much my entire life, so, you know, as president, but even as senior vice provost at Emory, so I would continue to do those sorts of things. There are a lot of great things about being the university president.

Part of it has to do with focusing on the faculty, as I said, but the faculty may be the heart of the university, but the students are the reason why the university exists, and so I really look forward to those interactions, strategically, but also as opportunities for me to mentor and support students.

You know, I like to talk and give career advice, graduate school and professional advice, and many of the interactions I've had with student leaders exist even today after a couple decades. I'm personally invested in students.

You know, once I've worked with them, I care about them as people, and so in addition to getting the work done, you know, I look forward to that interaction.

**Carson Dale:**

Thank you.

**Brian Lamb:**

Okay, good question.

Okay, Carson.

**Carson Good:**

Good afternoon. First of all, Chair Lamb, thank you.

**Brian Lamb:**

Yes, sir.

**Carson Good:**

This has been...I'm so impressed. I just got on this board, I think, last summer, and I'm just so impressed at your leadership and the way you've kept things going.

(2:55:24 - 2:56:32)

**Brian Lamb:**

Yes, sir.

**Carson Good:**

And Chairman Hosseini, I appreciate the passion you've put into this university for many, many years, and it was the BOG and the focus, and I don't know how you run these big businesses and still, because I'm trying to do it and be chairman of the airport, and you're running a \$10 billion business as the chairman, and thank you very much, and I know what you put in. I also know, having gone through a presidential, a CEO search at the airport as the chairman, particularly in

Sunshine, I flew all over the country, dinners, breakfasts, and I think I knew a lot more than the average person on the board because I'd had those look you in the eye kind of stuff, and I have to respect that that you've done, and the trustees, and Rahul Patel. I haven't met you, but I've heard fantastic things about you.

But I also want to thank you, Mr. Ono, Dr. Ono. These Florida processes are not fun, and we tend to chase off a lot of great applicants, and I want to make sure that that's not what we're doing here. I appreciate you doing it.

(2:56:32 - 3:04:42)

I appreciate you going to the energy and coming and putting your name in for this great state. That being said, I've been overwhelmed with questions from all my Bull Gator friends, and my alum, and it's been 20, 30 phone calls over the course of the last three weeks. Doctors, lawyers, very conservative people, some moderately liberal people, politicians, statesmen, 99% expressing concern and questions.

I did listen to Tuesday's, and I kept telling everybody, look, listen to the presentation on Tuesday. These are great people. These are smart people, and a lot, to be frank, a lot of people felt like there weren't a lot of tough questions asked on Tuesday, and I think that tended to upset people more than if we asked good questions.

So, I'm going to ask a bunch of questions that people have asked me to ask, and I share some of the concerns. I really want to get to 'yes,' but I have some concerns, and I think maybe we can talk, and a lot of it's been done.

The job of the president of the university is to, and not necessarily in this order, it's to run a business. It's a \$16 million, \$15 million business. It's to fundraise from alumni, from legislatures, it's to bring the money in and the fundraise. It's to manage professors and teachers, to recruit the best new professors, and the best students, and the grant money.

And it's to lead. It's education, and education is absolutely teaching people trades that they can go out and earn lots of money on, but as this began with the Greeks, when you can't have a democracy without education, and education is in part philosophical, and the first state university, I believe, was Thomas Jefferson's University of Virginia, and he passionately opened the University of Virginia, and he said our republic cannot survive unless people understand—one, are educated, and educated, wholly educated, and educated in our first principles. So, what I want to ask you about is, and to say we don't like DEI, we don't DEI, is kind of like telling your kids don't do drugs and stay in school.

That's great, but is it better to say, hey, here's what you should do. You should win the national champion swimming competition. You should go to medical school. Wouldn't it be great to be a doctor? Wouldn't it be great to be a great real estate developer, and so inspiring as parents, a lot of us find a lot more effective than say don't do this or don't do DEI, so a lot of us want to know where is your heart and your root in, and by the way, I think we should teach all civilizations. Before I say western civilization and upset the Orlando Sentinel, our students, if they're going to be in a world now, they need to understand South Asian Indian civilization and values, and understand what values are in different countries, understand what values are in East Asia, in Japan.

We should understand all these values if they're students, but we live here, and I think you would agree that economically, which is part of what we're trying to teach in college, western European civilization has been extremely successful over the last thousand years. I don't know how long that lasts for, but what are the principles of western civilization and more particularly the American founding principles that you find most important to teach students?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Kind of easy for me to answer because I was an undergraduate at the University of Chicago, and they have a core curriculum where every student, regardless of their major, has to take a course called "Western Civilization," and we read the Federalist Papers.

We wrote Democracy in America...We *read* Democracy in America by de Tocqueville. I think one of the crown jewels of the University of Florida is the Hamilton School, and if you really look at it, it's not just about civil discourse.

It's about becoming American. It's about understanding what I believe is great about America, the fact that we have a democracy here that's the envy of the world, that part of the role of the University of Florida is to educate all of our students so they become better citizens.

Some of them will stay in Florida. Others will go across the continent, but they represent not only the university, but they represent the country.

You know, I'm someone who's naturalized, and for me, I grew up in Baltimore, Maryland, and I remember looking at Fort McHenry and thinking about Francis Scott Key and the bombs bursting in the air and the Star-Spangled Banner remaining there, and so for me, it's personal. For me, I believe that that should be part of an education, and what's great about the University of Florida is that through the Hamilton School, that they have put that at the forefront of bringing people together to be informed citizens to protect the democracy that makes our country great.

**Carson Good:**

Is there anything else you would add? No? So, to be clear, when we talk about DEI, and we've got the videos and we've seen them, this is what we're being asked about. There's good old fashioned...I don't think any of us would be against trying to make sure that minority groups are educated and we pay attention to educating children and students from different minority things.

I don't think when what we've heard on the videos from UBC and from our just old-fashioned affirmative action, we're hearing catchwords from critical race theory, which is rooted in 1930s communism, which is, I think you would agree, much of the noise around it over the last 10 years has been funded by foreign governments. So, I don't think we're talking about plain old DEI. At the airport, by the way, Mori, we have quota programs that are federally mandated, and as does the DOT, in federal grants, and as of yet, Trump hasn't removed them, and we have them.

We, by the grant mandates, carry them out. So, I want to ask you about terms, you have lived in a world that we just don't live in in Florida. You've lived in a world of true critical race theory where you're in ivory towers with thought leaders of the very far left.

And so, I want to ask you, I'm not going to ask you your question as much, but what they mean by this. So, while at UBC, you created the President's Task Force on Anti-Racism. What do they mean when they say anti-racism? They just told me not being racist.

(3:04:43 - 3:06:56)

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I'm an immunologist, so that's not my specific area. I just want to say that I believe that things like systemic racism, what's taught in courses, have to be looked at, because my experience since then has shown that that's very divisive and can actually be counterproductive with respect to the inclusion and the campus-wide cohesion that I think we should aim for as a university. So I can't really speak for the experts in that area because I really am not an expert in that area.

**Carson Good:**

So, your task force that you recommended, and this is at UBC, it's your President's Task Force, the video-

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Yeah, sure.

**Carson Good:**

I've seen the videos, we need to deconstruct multiple registers, scale, deconstruct, recognizing underlying contexts that pre-exist UBC. Most hiring practice results in expanding whiteness and multiculturalism. While the university has been engaged in decolonization, discrimination based against indigenous people is embedded.

Number two, we need to act to ensure the clear directives from the university leadership to expanding whiteness and strategic hires, which we've heard before. I'll skip through that because we already talked, but examine whiteness, multiculturalism that reproduce white-influenced power dynamics. Most of us are just not that familiar with this, far left-leaning, these terms.

When they talk about racism, what particular, can you enumerate the races they're talking about being discriminated against? We're just talking about African-Americans or is it everybody but me?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I'm not them, but I think from a British Columbia perspective, I think that they're talking about the fact that...but I'm not an expert, right, but I'm trying to answer your question, that these are indigenous lands. They're talking about the original individuals who lived on the land where the university is. That's my estimation of what they mean.

(3:06:58 - 3:07:38)

**Carson Good:**

You think that racism just deals with indigenous people in that particular area?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I don't think that at all. No, I think there's racism-

**Carson Good:**



I'm asking you...this CRT theory where the book came out and you didn't write it, but you announced it and said, what are they talking about when they're talking about racism? Who are they talking about?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I'm not really an expert in this area, but I believe that that kind of construct is really not conducive to the kind of university community that I think we should all strive for.

(3:07:38 - 3:08:42)

**Carson Good:**

Here's a real curious one. I'd love help. What is whiteness that is so bad? I'm not asking what you think it may be, but you quoted it and you quoted it and it came out of the lexicon of this critical race theory movement. What is whiteness and why do they, not you, think it's so bad?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I don't really know why they think it's so bad. I don't personally think there's any problem with being white. But you come from that academic surrounding. You grew around those people. What do they mean by we need to avoid whiteness and train people not to be whiteness?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

To be really clear, I'm a medical scientist. I work with test tubes and pipettes-

**Carson Good:**

You're a university professor.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I am. But you said I'm not in those departments where they, like at UF itself, most of this is happening in certain schools and certain departments. That's not where I spend a lot of my time. Like you say, I spend a lot of time raising money and choosing good people. So, I'm really, to be frank, I'm not an expert in that area.

(3:08:46 - 3:09:17)

**Carson Good:**

So, I did read and whiteness, as it was on the wall of the Smithsonian in the African American Museum, has attributes including punctuality--these are all bad things--protestant work ethic and they impede the advantage of disadvantage. You don't believe that.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Sorry. Could you say that-

**Carson Good:**

Because you said you don't believe that whiteness, which is inferred to be bad, even in your own words, is things like punctuality, hard work, and that needs to be avoided.

(3:09:18 - 3:09:53)

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I don't believe that at all.

**Carson Good:**

I didn't think you did. So, you used the word decolonization. What did you mean when you said decolonization?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Well, I think what they mean in British Columbia is that these were indigenous lands and that at some time people came from Europe to colonize that. And so, I think what they refer to as decolonization is addressing that moment where the lands that were indigenous land, where colonists came in. I think that's what they refer to.

(3:09:53 - 3:10:34)

**Carson Good:**

How do you decolonize?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I really am not an expert in that.

**Carson Good:**

You said decolonization.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Yeah, because the task force that worked on it put that forward. But I think that's what they mean.

**Carson Good:**

But it's your video and you look pretty enthusiastic about it.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Yeah. Like I said, I'm not enthusiastic about that. I did say that at that time because the task force had made a set of recommendations to me, but I really am not an expert in that area.

**Carson Good:**

Okay. What are, in your words, you use white influence power dynamics. What does that mean?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Once again, this is a-

**Carson Good:**

I'm curious. I'm really trying to-

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Yeah, yeah.

(3:10:35 - 3:10:56)

**Carson Good:**

Because that's the question people are asking. Not just, hey, do we take care of some disadvantaged people and give a little bit of a help to somebody? What does white influence power dynamics that we need to rid ourselves of?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

It's not something that I personally believe. The task force put it forward. I'm not an expert in that area, once again.

**Carson Good:**

But that's your video.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I understand.

(3:10:56 - 3:11:07)

**Carson Good:**

Looks enthusiastic. By the way, another great thing I heard about you from... I mean, I spoke to parents at Michigan. I spoke to two professors there over the last two weeks.

(3:11:08 - 3:11:24)

I called my own fraternity and talked to one of the alumni. I spoke to somebody who's very active as a doctor in your hospital there. One of the good things they said is that you are great about coming forward, giving speeches, going to football games, being transparent, and I did get that.

(3:11:25 - 3:11:53)

You created this history center in one of your videos dedicated to inclusive history and reinterpreting history. And I'm not using exact words as we now know it and not whitewashing it. What did you mean by that history center?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

So let me be really clear. I didn't create the history center. It was created...planned before I arrived at the University of Michigan. The leader of it is somebody called Earl Lewis.

(3:11:53 - 3:12:12)

He used to be the president of the Mellon Foundation, and he was at Emory University, so I know him. I think there are aims of the inclusive history project that I think would be fine at the University of Florida, like the Hamilton Center. A lot of it has to do with analysis of Western civilization.

(3:12:12 - 3:12:28)

It includes that history in the context of the overall understanding of history globally. And so, there are a lot of aspects of the inclusive history project that I think are fine. I think there are aspects of the inclusive history project that wouldn't be fine at the University of Florida, and I wouldn't support them.

(3:12:28 - 3:12:46)

For example, there's an aspect that looks at systemic racism. There's an aspect that looks at reparations and things like that, and I can say categorically that that's something that I would not support at the University of Florida because of the laws of the state. And as I said, I would commit to supporting those.

(3:12:46 - 3:13:05)

**Carson Good:**

I had a prominent state senator say that it sounded Orwellian.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Can I say, the other thing is that the inclusive history project, I'm sure they would say so, is fiercely independent of the president of the university. What we did was to provide financial support, but it's not really something I created.

(3:13:07 - 3:13:32)

**Brian Lamb:**

Governor Good, can we bring it in for a landing soon, friend?

**Carson Good:**

Yeah, you also said that racism is one of America's original sins. I loved, by the way, some of your talks on being a Christian and how you came to Christianity-

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Thank you.

**Carson Good:**

-and I found it very moving, by the way. Otherwise, I wouldn't move to religion here, but you started it.

(3:13:34 - 3:14:09)

Original sin in Christianity, as we know, and there are various different writers on that since 200 or 300 AD, is sin that we're born with, that we were actually, before that, we were conceived in. That is, in Christian theology, cannot be humanly escaped in any way except through a total rebirth, a total uprooting with divine intervention. Did I get the Christian part right? In fact, this is C.S. Lewis, one of your Anglicans.

(3:14:09 - 3:14:29)

You got it better than I did. So, if racism is America's original sin, and those are your words, I mean, what does that mean?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I would say that I regret the use of those words at that time. I don't remember exactly when I said it, but I should have been more precise.

(3:14:29 - 3:14:36)

**Carson Good:**

It's 2023.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Yeah, so I think I should have been much more careful about my use of words. I hear where you're coming from.

(3:14:36 - 3:15:27)

**Carson Good:**

So, the word racism is original sin comes in part from the 1619 project by Jada Elisha's "Are You a Racist?" and a few of these other CRT books. You're kind of denouncing a lot of the things that you said, or how do you think...and I've talked to some of the progressives on University of Michigan campus-

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Yeah.

**Carson Good:**

-I mean, how would you tell them that you no longer believe all those things that you said a year ago, two years ago, four years ago?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Exactly the way I have said to you is that I have, through experience, watched what I think had the original intentions were good, and that I have seen the negative consequences, and I have been inspired by what's happened in Florida.

(3:15:29 - 3:15:44)

And much like the New York Times article talked about the experiences of faculty and students on campus and how they didn't feel included, they felt it was actually creating division in the community. I've taken all that into account.

**Carson Good:**

Good answer.

(3:15:45 - 3:15:52)

I'll have two more quick questions. Two more quick topics.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Sure.

**Carson Good:**

Gender, again, you've answered that.

(3:15:52 - 3:16:04)

Thank you. Do you have any...have you had since you've been either at BC or at Michigan boys competing in girls' sports?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I don't think that's appropriate.

**Carson Good:**

But have you...have they...have they done it?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I don't think there are any at Michigan.

(3:16:04 - 3:16:37)

I talked to the athletic director, and I don't know of any at UC.

**Carson Good:**

Another question, do you know if either BCU or UM have cut off minor boys' genitals or girls' breasts?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Say that again, I'm sorry.

**Carson Good:**

Do you know if University of Michigan Medical School or any of your programs have, in those programs, those gender-affirming programs, have they cut off minor...ever cut off, not once or twice, but ever?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I'm not really qualified to be able to say.

(3:16:37 - 3:16:40)

**Carson Good:**

You're a physician.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I'm a scientist.

**Carson Good:**

Okay, you're a scientist.

(3:16:40 - 3:16:56)

Biological scientist.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

But also, frankly, I don't have a complete encyclopedic knowledge of everything that's happened.

**Carson Good:**

You wouldn't deny or say either way whether that's happened in Michigan's medical programs?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I don't want to misspeak unless I really know that what I'm saying is correct.

(3:16:56 - 3:17:07)

**Carson Good:**

Now, the last issue is COVID. In February, and these are a list of questions, and by the way, several politicians have put them up on Facebook. You might just want to note some down.

(3:17:07 - 3:17:23)

At the time of COVID, in 2023, you mandated vaccine boosters to all on-campus dormitory students. You're an immunologist. Now, this one, you can't, you're an immunologist.

(3:17:23 - 3:17:26)

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I am an immunologist.

**Carson Good:**

Keep going back to, "I'm an immunologist."

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I am.

(3:17:26 - 3:17:57)

**Carson Good:**

So, how do you feel about that decision? And 2023 was, we hear, we all think of COVID in Florida, and it's funny because we think of COVID from like March of 2020 to like July of 2020. So, what do you think about that mandate?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

So, I have a, had at Michigan, a chief health officer and an actual committee who are much more qualified than I because they're actually doctors. I'm a scientist.

(3:17:57 - 3:18:09)

And so, they made the recommendation to me to do that. So, that's the answer to your question.

**Carson Good:**

But you're...wouldn't an immunologist know better than a MD?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

No, no.

(3:18:09 - 3:18:21)

**Carson Good:**

An immunologist, I'm a basic...I'm a mouse doctor. I try to...I tried to...my thesis was trying to figure out why, in my case, rats, but why mice actually get diabetes. And we found the genes that are responsible for that.

(3:18:21 - 3:18:33)

So, I'm...you don't want to see me if you have a medical problem. I'm a test tube kind of guy, to be frank. So, no, so no, I would not know better than a medical doctor or a public health expert as well.

(3:18:33 - 3:18:54)

**Carson Good:**

So, based on what you know now, do you think that would, to mandate vaccine mandates to 18 and 19 year olds, would you...would you do that today? Would you not...forget about the rules and how...do you think that was the right medical decision in hindsight?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

It's really hard to say. I don't have enough experience in looking at the clinical data. I think it's quite varied.

(3:18:54 - 3:18:58)

So, I don't, it's, I don't have enough to go on to say something.

**Carson Good:**

Last question.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Yeah.

(3:19:02 - 3:19:35)

**Carson Good:**

In 2020, when Mori was president of the university or chairman of the University of Florida, I was chairman of the Orlando airport and COVID came in and we went from 90,000 people a day to 1200 people a day. And, and I was on the phone all the time with the governor's office and the hospitals here. Governor DeSantis made, I think somebody in North Dakota made a similar decision, but DeSantis made some very bold decisions that really went against, you know, opening us up, not mandating.

(3:19:37 - 3:19:57)

Why do you think, and I think most people think he made the right decision. And now in hindsight, those were bold decisions. What do you think in your mind motivated him to do that? And June, July, August, May of 2020.

(3:19:58 - 3:20:21)

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

What do I think motivated DeSantis to make that decision?

**Carson Good:**

To open up the state, to begin opening up the state, to not mandate vaccines. What do you think motivated him?

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I don't...I don't know because I haven't talked to him about it, but, but I'll tell you that the same situation happened in British Columbia when I was president of UBC. We actually were beholden to the decisions of the provincial health officer.

(3:20:22 - 3:20:36)

Her name is Bonnie Henry. And so, we didn't, presidents of universities didn't have the latitude to, on their own, make a decision about what happens on their campus. We had a legal responsibility to follow the direction of the provincial health officer.

(3:20:37 - 3:20:53)

Much like in the U.S., there were even federal expectations that were made. And so, presidents didn't have complete degrees of freedom to act on their own. In terms, now in retrospect, if you're going to ask me in retrospect, I don't, I haven't talked to Governor DeSantis.



(3:20:53 - 3:21:09)

I want to talk to him. I think it was the right decision that was made. I think that if you look at what I know about student satisfaction and experience following at University of Michigan, pretty much a whole year, students were remote.

(3:21:09 - 3:21:15)

They were sitting in their dorms. They don't, they didn't come to school to sit in their dorms, looking at a computer screen. There was a lot of dissatisfaction.

(3:21:16 - 3:21:32)

And so now, especially with vaccines being available or other approaches with PPE, I think the decision that was made here was the correct one. And so, in retrospect, I understand where he's coming from. But like I said, I haven't talked to Governor DeSantis, so I don't really know where he was coming from.

(3:21:32 - 3:21:49)

But I think it was the right decision.

**Carson Good:**

Oh, I agree.

**Charles Lydecker:**

In fairness, I would just say Governor DeSantis is literally the gold standard for, you know, dealing with the COVID environment and some of the issues that we have here.

(3:21:49 - 3:22:21)

And there's a distinction that's worth making for us, you, Chair Hosseini at that time, me running a business, any of us here, including when I was on this board of operating in the state of Florida and the environment of the state of Florida, because Governor DeSantis was actually way out front, taking the lead, taking the bullets for the rest of us. I don't believe that's the environment that the University of Michigan was in, in the state of Michigan. I think it's a fair point and a good observation on your part.

(3:22:21 - 3:22:29)

**Carson Good:**

Right, right.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Certainly wasn't the case, wasn't the case with British Columbia at all. We were completely in reporting to the provincial health officer.

(3:22:29 - 3:25:43)

**Carson Good:**

I understand. Okay. People have said, well, he took a chance and got lucky.

I was talking to him all the time. You were talking, I know you were talking to him all the time. Yes, the other people would say he studied the data and got the right scientists around him.

**Charles Lydecker:**

He studied the data.

**Carson Good:**

No, I don't think that's the main reason. I think the main reason is his core principles, guiding light, which were American principles of the government.

Before the government takes your rights away from you, the onus of proof is huge on the government. And the government just, out of principle, can't take people's rights away unless...and the first few months he did. I think it's that guy...and this goes back to, I guess, my original point is the guiding light.

And I think the guiding light determines a lot of things.

**Charles Lydecker:**

I would just make one observation there is that I don't think governor DeSantis took very lightly the lives that he would be affecting only for philosophy. I think we literally had the smartest governor.

**Brian Lamb:**

Okay. All right. There's a lot of hands.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

Can I just respond real quick? I'm really looking forward to meeting the governor. Like I said, I look up to a lot of decisions he's made. And I think that, I don't know why he makes some of these decisions, but I'm looking forward to meeting him.

**Eric Silagy:**

I think the governor took very seriously his job, like the president's job of keeping students safe, which is why today we still require...the state requires five vaccines for every student before they can go to public school here in Florida. It is a state mandate.

**Dr. Santa Ono:**

I completely agree.

**Eric Silagy:**

Because it is about keeping students as well as not just the student who's being vaccinated, but the students around them safe.

**Carson Good:**

I never said he did it just for philosophy. He had scientists and data-

**Eric Silagy:**

Right, right.

**Carson Good:**

-studied the pros and the cons. But the burden of proof, it's not like, let's shut everybody down until we figure out what works. The burden of proof is on the government.

**Brian Lamb:**

I'm going to call for a motion. I see a hand going up, but we have got to bring this in for a landing. So, I've been incredibly generous.

**Mori Hosseini:**

I'll just respond. You're absolutely right. By the way, the governor did a study of science. I saw it on myself. It's just a paper all over the place. And we follow him. The only time that I got vote of no confidence from our faculty was during COVID.

Both at University of Florida as Embry-Riddle. But I want to...you've made a comment about the trust...the Board of Trustees and good job they do and all of that. No other university has a strong governance than University of Florida.

Number two...and we are honored to have Western Civilization at Hamilton. We created that. This Board of Trustees did.

The question all of you should ask, why he wants to come to University of Florida? Why? Why would he go through this? What's the reason? Because he has, as Chancellor knows, I sent him the copy of contract he had with Michigan. Eight years left in his contract. If...I am a skeptic, I'm old.

(3:25:44 - 3:26:51)

So, you just have to show me. He has eight years left. If you look at in totality, and we showed it to the Chancellor.

If you look at his totality of contract between UF and Michigan, A, he never had to leave Michigan. He had an eight-year contract left. And if you look at in totality, we're paying him less than Michigan.

Why he wants to come? Because he doesn't say it, I'll say it. He had it. He could not live there when he had to have security, armed guard for his security.

Because he was attacked. He doesn't say it, I say it. We have absolutely...the question you all ask, great question.

But we should not leave it to just one trustees of another university, goes on social media, and says something, and lots of people, but not giving people a chance. Give this man a chance, like America did to President Reagan.

**Brian Lamb:**

Okay.

(3:26:52 - 3:27:42)

Thank you, Chairman. Sorry to cut everybody off, but it's not even that it's a long day, I have hopefully demonstrated a tremendous amount of latitude beyond what we typically do in a board meeting because of the unique situation.

But it is time to call the motion. Okay. I think you have more than enough information.

We have folks on Zoom. Rachel, I'm going to ask that we do...once we hear a motion, we have an alphabetical...generally what we do, that's customary, didn't make that up, alphabetical vote. You can call out the names and take us through it.

Okay. And there will be discussion. I will carry the motion like a normal Robert's Rules vote order.

So, there will be discussion, which we already have had a lot of. So, I'm just going to say that. And I reserve the right to cut off discussion if it drags too long.

(3:27:43 - 3:30:35)

Is there a motion on the floor?

**Charles Lydecker:**

Yes, Mr. Chairman. I would like to make a motion to ratify Dr. Ono to become the next President of the University of Florida.

**Kimberly Dunn:**

Second by Dunn.

**Brian Lamb:**

I hear a motion and a second. Any further discussion? No further discussion. You have discussion? We have any more discussion or are we going to go? I'm calling the discussion.

It's been moved and properly second. If there's no further discussion, all in favor say aye. But before you vote, I'm going to ask that you're fine. Are you clear on the motion?

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Yeah, the motion is clear. I was going to do roll call vote.

**Brian Lamb:**

Okay. You do roll call vote. Is there any discussion?

**Alan Levine:**

Wait, is there any discussion?

**Brian Lamb:**

I've asked three times. Are there discussion? Okay. You guys just cut it out-

**Alan Levine:**

I thought I saw somebody's hand.

**Brian Lamb:**

-being ridiculous.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Okay. We're now going to move into the vote. Roll call vote portion.  
Chair Lamb?

**Brian Lamb:**

In favor. Aye.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Governor Levine?

**Alan Levine:**

No.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Governor Bell Barnett?

**Ashley Bell Barnett:**

No.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Governor Cerio?

**Tim Cerio:**

No.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Governor Dale?

**Carson Dale:**

Aye.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Governor Diaz?

**Manny Diaz Jr.:**

No.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Governor Dunn?

**Kimberly Dunn:**

Aye.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Governor Edge?

**Aubrey Edge:**

No.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Governor Frost?

**Patricia Frost:**

No.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Governor Good?

**Carson Good:**

I really, really want to try to get to a yes. But I, this philosophical difference is just too far. And to not know whether you cut off a boy's genitals or stand critical race theory, I can't get...your hearts in it. And I...but I'm...I wish you the very best and will support you if you win.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

That's a 'no' vote, Governor Good?

**Carson Good:**

No vote.

**Brian Lamb:**

Is it a no vote? Okay.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Governor Haddock?

**Edward Haddock:**

Yes.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Governor Jones?

**Ken Jones:**

No.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Governor Lydecker?

**Charles Lydecker:**

Yes.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Governor Mateer? Governor Mateer?

Governor Oliva?

**Jose Olvia:**

No.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Governor Renner?

**Paul Renner:**

No.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

Governor Silagy?

**Eric Silagy:**

Yes.

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

The motion fails.

**Brian Lamb:**

Mr. Cerio, did you vote? Did you vote? Okay.

**Brian Lamb:**

Okay. All right. The motion fails.

(3:30:35 - 3:31:31)

First time that's really happened. So let me just react to that. I thank everyone for their feedback and their comments and participation in the meeting.

Dr. Ono, of course, Chair Hosseini, thank you for your discussion. That was the only agenda item. Rachel, is there any other item?

**Rachel Kamoutsas:**

The consent agenda. We can...

**Brian Lamb:**

We can knock out the consent agenda. Okay. In your package, you have the consent agenda. Is there any other questions or comments on the consent? If not, I'll call for a motion.

**Alan Levine:**

Moved.

**Brian Lamb:**

It's been moved.

**Jose Oliva:**

Second.

**Brian Lamb:**

Second. Second, Governor Oliva. Further discussion? All in favor, say aye.

**Group:**

Aye.

**Brian Lamb:**

Opposed, like sign. Motion carries. Okay. Meeting adjourned.

(3:31:31)