

Resolution

Amending the Name of the George C. Wallace Building at the University of Alabama at Birmingham

WHEREAS, diversity, inclusion, and respect are fundamental values of the University of Alabama System;

WHEREAS, under Board Rule 411, the Board of Trustees of the University of Alabama (“Board of Trustees”) has the exclusive discretion to amend, remove, or withdraw any naming at any time and for any reason; and

WHEREAS, on June 8, 2020, the President Pro Tempore of the Board of Trustees appointed a working group of Trustees to conduct a comprehensive review of the names of buildings, structures, and spaces on all UA System campuses; and

WHEREAS, the working group’s review is governed by the institutional best interests of the University of Alabama System, recognizing that although no person is infallible and widespread views commonly change over time, the Board of Trustees must take great care to demonstrate and honor the current values of the University of Alabama System; and

WHEREAS, the working group’s initial inquiry is to determine whether an individual after whom a building, structure, or space is named made any substantial, lasting, and unique contributions to the University of Alabama System; and

WHEREAS, if the working group concludes that an individual made substantial, lasting, and unique contributions, the working group will then weigh those contributions against any actions the individual took, or views the individual had, that are inconsistent with the current values of the University of Alabama System, taking into consideration the prevalent moral, religious, and political norms of the individual’s time; and

WHEREAS, based upon consultation with several historical experts and its own investigation, the working group reviewed the historical record as it relates to George Wallace, the 45th Governor of the State of Alabama; and

WHEREAS, in 1972, Governor Wallace ran for President of the United States and, while campaigning in Laurel, Maryland, was shot five times in an assassination attempt; and

WHEREAS, the assassination attempt left Governor Wallace paralyzed from the waist down, and he underwent extensive physical therapy at the Spain Rehabilitation Center, a part of the UAB Health System; and

WHEREAS, since the then-new physical education building was “closely connected” to the Spain Rehabilitation Center, and in recognition of Governor Wallace’s “substantial support, interest, and contributions to the University of Alabama in Birmingham,” the Board

of Trustees named the physical education building on the Birmingham campus the “George C. Wallace Building” at its meeting on July 14, 1975; and

WHEREAS, Governor Wallace originally ran for Governor of Alabama in 1958 and was endorsed by the NAACP while the Ku Klux Klan supported his Democratic primary opponent, John Patterson;

WHEREAS, after losing the Democratic nomination in 1958 to Mr. Patterson, Governor Wallace adopted segregationist policies and views that helped him secure the 1962 nomination and gubernatorial election, and he famously declared during his 1963 gubernatorial inauguration address, “In the name of the greatest people that ever trod this earth, I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny, and I say segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever”;

WHEREAS, Governor Wallace built his political career in substantial part on defending an unlawful system of segregation, appealing to and exacerbating racial animosity, and resisting lawful court orders, all to the detriment of the State of Alabama and the University of Alabama System; and

WHEREAS, despite the United State Supreme Court’s landmark ruling nine years earlier in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* that segregated public schools were unconstitutional, Governor Wallace attempted to prevent two African-Americans from registering for classes at the Tuscaloosa campus by standing in front of the doorway of Foster Auditorium; and

WHEREAS, the working group recognized that Governor Wallace later apologized to the same African-Americans he had once denounced; in the words of the late Congressman John Lewis, Governor Wallace “deserve[d] recognition for seeking redemption for his mistakes, for his willingness to change and to set things right with those he harmed and with his God”; and, as observed by Reverend Jesse Jackson, Governor Wallace was a “transformed man” who deserved “forgiveness, redemption, and restoration”; and

WHEREAS, the working group likewise recognized, however, that Governor Wallace’s transformation does not erase the stain of his efforts to sow racial divisiveness and to promote conduct contrary to the law, nor does it erase the fact that for many of the students, faculty, and staff who comprise the University of Alabama System community, as well as individuals across the United States, Governor Wallace’s name remains an enduring symbol of racial injustice and rekindles memories of one of the State of Alabama’s darkest hours; and

WHEREAS, because such a symbol should not adorn a building or space on any of the University of Alabama System campuses, the working group unanimously recommended that the Board of Trustees remove Governor Wallace’s name from the physical education building at UAB;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of Trustees that the name of the George C. Wallace Building on the Birmingham campus is hereby amended to the Physical

Education Building.