

# Resignation of a President

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**Editor's Note:** On Thursday morning, July 23, 1970, at the regular monthly meeting of the Board of Regents, John Herbert Hollomon resigned as president of the University. His decision had been one of the best kept secrets in some time, coming as a surprise not only to the some fifty spectators and reporters but also to the six members of the Board of Regents seated at the table with Hollomon.

The meeting began somewhat late with vice chairman H. K. Calvert presiding in the place of the late Reuben Sparks, who had resigned from the board in June shortly before his death of a heart attack.

In routine manner the minutes of the June 25 meeting were approved. Calvert issued a statement on behalf of the board on the death of Sparks and then called for election of a new regents' chairman and vice chairman. Calvert was elected to fill the slot and Mrs. Nancy Davies was named vice chairman. Calvert welcomed Robert Lollar to the board. Lollar, who had once served as Governor Bartlett's legislative liaison man, had been appointed by the governor to fill the remainder of Sparks' board term. Absent from the board meeting was Walter Neustadt who was vacationing in Maine.

Still in routine manner Calvert called for the president's report. Hollomon said he had two items, mentioned the report of the committee looking into the May disturbances, and then began reading the statement reprinted here. Realization dawned slowly, and what was to have been a rather routine meeting suddenly became the day's hottest news.

The rest of that Thursday was long and difficult. Visitors strolled in and out of the president's office.

Phones rang. Reporters interviewed and photographed. And everyone waited. The regents continued with the day's agenda, finishing up after noon and going immediately to the post-meeting luncheon. Ahead for the afternoon was an executive session to discuss Hollomon's resignation and his subsequent recommendation that regents' policy be followed and that Dr. Pete Kyle McCarter, OU provost, be named acting president.

The waiting continued until almost 4:45 p.m. when the regents again opened the meeting, accepted Hollomon's resignation effective September 1 and officially named McCarter acting president as of that date.

Presented here are Hollomon's complete resignation statement and the statements of the Board of Regents, the governor and OU Association president, Roy Cartwright.

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I have had time alone following last month's meeting. The events of the past few months weighed heavily on us all, and I needed to sort them out. With humility and concern for the University, let me give you, the University community and the people of the state my own conclusions.

In voting to continue me as president in June, this board acted for the best interests of the University after I had refused to resign under pressure. Had I resigned in those circumstances, the University's independence and academic freedom would have been jeopardized. If you had dismissed me, your own constitutional independence would have been undermined.

Shortly following the meeting, comments by the governor, and his appointment of a member of his

former staff as a regent, made it clear that the assaults on the University and on me personally were to continue. The issue of my continuing as president, as raised publicly in these statements, raises a deep question concerning the fundamental values of our country's institutions of higher learning. The survival of these institutions depends on the protection of values which, when threatened, pose the possibility of the demise of our society's deepest tradition of liberty and free institutions. Among these values are freedom of the university from outside political or ideological interference, the freedom of expression and dissent, the freedom to teach, to learn and to inquire without coercion, and the freedom of the academic community to govern itself justly under law.

These freedoms which lie at the heart of the university are being threatened in Oklahoma. To be specific

—The fate of our new draft constitution, approved by students, faculty, employee groups and the administration is in serious question despite the fact that it has been recognized nationally as a document that would preserve order while facilitating peaceful change.

—The proposed changes in the administrative and academic structure are now undermined by those who act on the fact that it pays to go around the president by bringing pressure on the regents to protect vested interests for narrow ends.

—The open system of budget and finance we have instituted to eliminate privately controlled "slush" funds seems only to ensure their continued uncontrolled use for special purposes rather than to ensure public responsibility—as is the policy of my administration.

—The faith and trust I have placed in our students to govern themselves, to be responsible for their own actions and to administer funds allocated by the State Regents for student activities are now questioned as a result of fears incited by the media. We seem to have forgotten that only faith and love in young people will build our future leaders. The people of Oklahoma seem to believe that their sons and daughters are incapable of managing their own lives. Do I, an eastern outsider, have more faith in the ability of parents to raise responsible, trustworthy young people than many parents here have themselves?

—Some leaders have recently insisted that the University deny admission to "undesirable characters." Under this proposal children of the citizens of this state could be denied an education on any whim or personal bias of an administration. This notion places dangerous and even dictatorial powers in the hands of those who can determine who is "undesirable." Any son or daughter may seem unworthy to those with such power.

—The assaults by the governor on the president and values of the University make it abundantly clear that any member of the faculty, any student or any employee may be persecuted or threatened for his way of life or his beliefs.

These threats to the integrity of this University and its members starkly represent the spirit of repression

now running rampant without reason among us. We find ourselves facing the prospects of an environment not free and joyous but stifling — one in which the right to think and act according to personal conviction whether my own, the student's or the teacher's is denied if it questions conventional wisdom.

When my continued presence becomes the excuse for denying citizens and members of this community those fundamental values on which our way of life depends, then I can no longer stand in silence. I cannot and will not be so used. To allow this would violate the confidence and support of all those people who have worked so hard for this institution and its potential for excellence.

I have done what I could to reach above narrow political interests for the common good of the University. It is a noble enterprise that we embarked upon together. And it must not fail. It will not die if the innovations we have attempted here can be separated from my personality, my style or my beliefs. Our plans, our dreams have captured the imagination of many both here and around the country and I have great trust in those ideas and ideals. The full responsibility for fulfilling this great venture in higher education rests as it always has with the members of this academic community. That community must insist upon those values of freedom from tyranny and seek to overcome the petty divisiveness of selfish political interest. Your very dignity is at stake.

So, I give you my resignation, though with hesitation and anguish. It is to be effective September 1 of this year. I have implicit faith and trust that you and the University community will oppose the very real threat of tyranny we now face. I know you will reaffirm the greatness and spirit of this place and of what you called on us and the hundreds of members of our planning venture to begin nearly three year ago in a time of hope and creativity. "The Future of the University" must not be shelved.

Before I leave, you will have my further recommendations on some top-level changes that should help the future administration and ensure that some of my mistakes are not passed on to my successor.

The provost, Dr. Pete Kyle McCarter, should be acting president, as regents' policy prescribes, until you have selected my successor.

Concerning the report released today on the disturbances in May, you may be assured that a prompt and fair process for deciding individual cases will be followed according to the due process approved by the regents. It is imperative that justice be even-handed and non-vindictive. In that way the community will find its own sources of strength and preserve its spirit from both violence and repression.

To complete the unfinished business before me and to provide an orderly transition, I am asking the regents to call a special meeting on August 27. You will have my final report at that time.

Let me only add in closing that I have many friends and colleagues in this state whom I love very much. To you and to the members of this board, do not give up our endeavor. For it is for that endeavor that I must go.

# ...and the Comment

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## H.K. Calvert for the Board of Regents

Dr. Hollomon's resignation this morning was a surprise to the members of the University of Oklahoma Board of Regents. It was very obvious that the decision was made with a great deal of thought and personal anguish.

The board has accepted Dr. Hollomon's resignation as of September 1, 1970, and his recommendation to appoint Dr. Pete Kyle McCarter as acting president as of that date.

4 Throughout the years that we have served as members of the OU Board of Regents, the University has had academic freedom, and we feel it has been a very open place for the expression of ideas. This philosophy of openness has been one of the basic tenets of the University for many years. Dr. Hollomon's strong convictions regarding student, faculty and employee participation in the issues which affect the University will continue to influence the members of the Board of Regents.

Speaking for the entire board, I can assure you, as evidenced by the June regent's meeting, that this board has not and will not be influenced by political pressures of any nature, either from inside or outside the University.

A search committee for a new president will be formed and announced as soon as possible. The committee will include members of the entire University community.

As Dr. Hollomon requested, the Board of Regents will have a special meeting in August. Due to the many conflicts caused by previous commitments on the part of members of the board, we have not yet set a firm date for the meeting.

We understand the concern of the University community — students, faculty, employees, alumni and other citizens of the state. As the regents of this institution, we will continue working to build a better University, and we hope that all in the community will join us in this endeavor.

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## Roy Cartwright for the Alumni Association

It seems unnecessary to say that President Hollomon's resignation was a surprise. It appeared to be that to nearly everyone. What I hope people will remember after he is gone is that Dr. Hollomon accomplished a great many fine things during his presidency.

The past few months have been difficult for everyone, and I do not think we can judge the University or the president by what has happened during this time. I know many alumni believe as I do that Dr. Hollomon has given new direction to the University, direction that was necessary in an age when the very nature of higher education is changing.

Probably any man coming into the OU presidency after the long and capable tenure of Dr. George L. Cross would have found the position difficult. Any man who would change the order of things would have faced problems. I hope, however, that in the ensuing months those on the campus and those of us away from OU will do everything we can to support the University and its acting president, Dr. Pete Kyle McCarter.

I am confident the search committee will select a strong and capable person for the presidential post. I am equally confident that the alumni will maintain their loyalty and support of the institution with full knowledge that change is necessary. None of us would like to go back and find the University unchanged from our student days for that would mean it had made no progress. We have made progress, and we will continue to do so.

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## Governor Dewey F. Bartlett

I have read Dr. J. Herbert Hollomon's statement of resignation as president of the University of Oklahoma. I wish him well in the future.

I support the board of regents in its decision to name Dr. Pete Kyle McCarter as acting president. I call upon the students, the faculty, the alumni and all citizens of the state to support Dr. McCarter.

I have full confidence that the board will be able to select a capable and highly-qualified man to serve as the new president of the University of Oklahoma.

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The years were swift and the mood changed. At his first press conference (above) in the spring of 1967 there was nothing but future for Hollomon as successor to George L. Cross. At left a happy Hollomon follows a smiling Governor Bartlett after the formal inaugural in October 1968. And then it was summer 1970, and Hollomon resigned the presidency two years and 23 days after taking the University's top job.



# The Acting President

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Pete Kyle McCarter

On September 1 Dr. Pete Kyle McCarter will step into a job that probably he never wanted in the first place. The conditions under which he is assuming the presidency are less than optimum, and the tasks he faces are not easy ones.

Being president of a college or university these days is not the soft prestigious job it once was. There was a time when a president was a ranking dignitary, aloof, consorting only with other high officials, running his institution from a quiet sanctum in some ivy covered building. But that job has disappeared and in its place is a post that requires the president to be fund raiser, diplomat, queller of disorder, keeper of the peace, politician, academician, mentor of youth and general good guy to the watchful public. There aren't many people waiting in line for the job.

McCarter is a gentle, soft spoken man who came to OU in 1953 from Mississippi. He is an English teacher. He was a vice president of the University under George Cross, became academic vice president under Hollomon and last January was named provost, the man in charge of all academic programs and budgeting.

A wry wit and an innate capacity for kindness have made McCarter many friends. He has strong support in the faculty, and although he is not well known by the students there is little doubt they will get along fine together.

Born July 15, 1910, in Batesville, Mississippi, McCarter attended the University of Mississippi where he received a bachelor of arts degree in 1931. He then enrolled at the University of Wisconsin where he was awarded a master of arts degree in 1933 and a doctor of philosophy degree in American literature in 1939.

He served on the University of Mississippi faculty from 1935 until he came to OU in 1953. At Mississippi his various responsibilities included teaching English courses, directing the news bureau, and serving as head of the English department, administrative assistant to the chancellor and dean of the faculty.

Now McCarter is stepping into the president's office. He hopes he won't be there long.

"I plan to be president only as long as it takes to find a replacement for Dr. Hollomon," he said.