

STUDENT SENATE BILL 2024-1729

TITLE: Resolution Proclaiming November 20th as Gator Transcendence Day

AUTHOR(S): Majority Party Leader Maya Idiculla, Minority Party Leader Max Banach, Senator Lucas Nadeau, Senator Rafeh Khan, Senator Arshan Falasiri

SPONSOR(S): Pride Student Union President Jonathan C. Stephens, Florida Players Director of Publicity Lauren Carlson, Senate President Blake Cox, Senate President Pro-Tempore Julia Seifer, Senator Priya Schramm, Senator Antonio Hendricks, Senator Anna Huber, Senator Kevin Orbegoso, Deputy Majority Party Leader Cole Bennett, Senator Aleah Henley, Senator David Stevens, Senator Abigail Melamed, Senator Mia Filaramo, Senator Madelyn Karmelek, Senator Tyler Schoeberlein, Senator Dylan Canella, Information & Communications Chairwoman Krystal Felix, Senator Maddie Seifer, Senator Ava Rathet, Senator Kate Mcnamara, Senator Alexa Trower, Senator Caroline Botts, Senator David Favors, Senator Anjani Sharma, Senator Ella Furman, Senator Gabriella Prieto, Senator Marian Enriquez, Budget Chairwoman Aditi Sakar, Senator Priya Majethia, Senator Maximo Toledo, Senator Jocelyn Riley, Senator Emma Fullerton, Senator Rasika Sriram, Senator Austin Britton, Senator Sophia Kolcun, Senator Mason Flynn, Senator Danielle Loftis, Senator Kayla Goldstein, Senator Anjali Natarajan, Senator Cassandra Urbenz, Senator Donal Bissainte, Senator Anusha Chaudhary, Senator AJ Ceylan, Deputy Minority Party Leader Victoria Peters, Judiciary Chairman Aaron Rubaii

WHEREAS, in 1956 the Florida State Legislature created the Florida Legislative Investigation Committee (hereafter referred to as the “Johns Committee” after its Committee Chairman, Sen. Charley E. Johns) as a response to the panic caused by the extreme paranoia of the Red Scare [1]; and,

WHEREAS, the Committee’s original intent was to investigate communist links to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in Florida. However, after the Committee found no such links, the investigations quickly turned to rooting out any individuals deemed “subversive” and a threat to national security from public higher education institutions. These actions were still done in the name of the anti-communist rhetoric common during this period, however, the overwhelming number of those investigated and harassed by the Johns Committee were members of minority groups, in particular members of the LGBTQ+ community [1][2]; and,

WHEREAS, the Johns Committee conducted numerous interrogations of university students and professors, often under situations of duress, in the hopes of expelling, firing, or in some cases even arresting them for suspected ‘national security threats’; numerous such investigations happened at the University of Florida, which was employed as a prime target of investigation for the Committee [3]; and,

WHEREAS, such interrogations were often conducted in motels or other third-party locations with the assistance of campus police departments and university administrators, and no legal representation or defense was given to those questioned. These interrogations often involved invasive questions regarding the individual’s personal life, including recent sexual activity and relations they might have had [3]; and,

WHEREAS, the Committee’s efforts reached their peak with the 1964 publication of *Homosexuality and Citizenship in Florida*, commonly known as the “Purple Pamphlet.” The inflammatory publication featured explicit content and depicted LGBTQ+ individuals as threats to societal values, an act which incited widespread backlash and controversy. Although the pamphlet was intended to justify the Committee’s agenda, it ultimately undermined public support, drawing condemnation from state and national figures [4][5]; and,

WHEREAS, the negative reception of the Purple Pamphlet contributed to the disbanding of the Johns Committee in 1965. However, during its nearly decade-long tenure, the Committee’s actions devastated the well-being, safety, and careers of hundreds, leading to the firing or resignation of at least 39 university faculty and the revocation of teaching credentials for over 70 educators across the state [6]; and,

WHEREAS, in 2015, the University of South Florida (USF) hosted a series of programs and events to acknowledge the historical injustices perpetrated by the Johns Committee against LGBTQ+ individuals. The activities included screening two documentaries, produced by the State University System colleges, by UF and UCF aimed at educating the university community about this period and commemorating those who suffered from these investigations [7]; and,

WHEREAS, the University of Florida is committed to upholding its core value of inclusion, recognizing it as the “connective tissue for all of our Core Values” [8]; and,

WHEREAS, the University of Florida remains focused on fostering “a safe, welcoming community . . . that unites everyone” [9]; and,

WHEREAS, the University of Florida Student Senate is committed to “safeguarding and advancing equality for all genders and sexualities on campus” [10]; and,

WHEREAS, a variety of advancements in LGBTQ+ rights have occurred since the Johns Committee era, including landmark rulings such as *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), legalizing same-sex marriage nationwide, and the historic appointments of Pete Buttigieg, Richard Grenell and Dr. Rachel Levine expanded the amount of representation of individuals in federal government roles. In the 2024 elections, several LGBTQ+ lawmakers were elected or reelected to House and Senate seats across the country. These include the reelection of Wisconsin Senator Tammy Baldwin, and the elections of Emily Randall of Washington, Sarah McBride of Delaware, and Julie Johnson of Texas, the latter three of whom will become the first LGBTQ+ representatives of their respective states, with Sarah McBride becoming the first openly

transgender U.S. Representative in the nation. These milestones reflect progress toward equality, yet the legacy of the Johns Committee underscores the need for continued vigilance in protecting LGBTQ+ rights [11][12][13][14]; and,

WHEREAS, in December 2022, the LGBTQ+ Cabinet hosted the Coalescence Summit, an event based on the concept “coalesce”, meaning to come together and unite as one, which gathered advocacy efforts from organizations such as the Pride Student Union and the LGBTQ+ Alumni Association. This summit served as a platform for collective action and dialogue, allowing community members to voice their needs and priorities while addressing tangible requests for new University administration. Through intentional programming, educational initiatives, and enhanced physical representation of LGBTQ+ history on campus, this summit sought to unite the queer community identifying its future needs, while fostering inclusivity and ensuring the University gives its full support to the LGBTQ+ community; then,

THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT the University of Florida Student Government condemns the actions of the Johns Committee on LGBTQ+ students, faculty and staff; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the University of Florida Student Government unequivocally supports the ability for LGBTQ+ individuals to express themselves openly and freely within the University of Florida; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the University of Florida Student Government honors and memorializes the lives affected by the Johns Committee; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the University of Florida Student Government calls on the University of Florida higher administration - in particular the Division of Student Life - to officially acknowledge the history of the Johns Committee and provide resources to students generally disturbed by the content matter; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the University of Florida Student Government calls on the University of Florida faculty and staff to further educate and address the history of the Johns Committee within their programming, as appropriate, in order to provide further discourse within the classroom; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT BE FINALLY RESOLVED AND PROCLAIMED THAT the University of Florida Student Government recognizes November 20th as **Gator Transcendence Day**, in memory of the faculty, staff, and students affected by the Johns Committee and the triumphant role of the LGBTQ+ community in advancing the University of Florida’s mission and purposes.

Proviso: A copy of this resolution shall be sent to Interim University President Kent Fuchs, Vice President for Student Life Heather White, University of Florida Board of Trustees Chair Morteza “Mori” Hosseni, Interim Director of Community and Belonging Solange Douglas, Professor Joe Spillane, History Librarian Jennifer Hofer, Associate Provost Angela Lindner, UF Faculty Senate President Dr. Sarah D. Lynne, Student Body President John Brinkman, Gender and Sexuality Protection Agency Head Riley Towbin, Pride Community Center of North Central Florida President Tamara Perry-Lunardo, Equality Florida Executive Director Nadine Smith,

UF LGBTQ+ Alumni President Dr. Gordon van Owen, UF LGBTQ+ Alumni Director of Membership Lisa Wilkes, Director Emeritus of the UCLA LGBT Center Dr. Ronni Sanlo.

- [1] - <https://web.uflib.ufl.edu/spec/exhibits/altufjohns.htm>
- [2] - <https://guides.ucf.edu/glbtc/johnscommittee>
- [3] - <https://www.vox.com/2019/11/4/20947565/florida-committee-terrorize-gay-people>
- [4] - <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00004805/00001/images>
- [5] - https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3994&context=fac_publications
- [6] - <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://outsfl.com/queer-by-the-beach/floridas-first-war-on-woke-part-one-the-johns-committee&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1729893457510427&usg=AOvVaw02ze-Z2a3qhbfxgBrhyll>
- [7] - <https://cloud.usf.edu/usf-news-archive/news/article/7088>
- [8] - <https://www.ufl.edu/about/core-values/#el-877a98b1>
- [9] - <https://sg.ufl.edu/branches/executive/agencies/>
- [10] - UF Student Senate Bill 2024-1047 - RESOLUTION CONDEMNING THE JOHNS COMMITTEE
- [11] - <https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/rachel-levine>
- [12] - <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/news-articles/news-articles-2020/3464-q-a-with-former-acting-director-of-national-intelligence-richard-grenell-on-pride-in-2020?highlight=WyJxIiwicSdzIl0=#:~:text=On%20February%202020%2C%20Richard%20Grenell,cabinet%20member%20in%20American%20history>
- [13] - <https://www.hrc.org/press-releases/secretary-pete-buttigieg-makes-history-as-first-openly-lgbtq-senate-confirmed-person-to-lead-a-department>
- [14] - <https://www.them.us/story/2024-election-results-lgbtq-precedents-historic-candidates-queer-wins-victory>


Blake Cox
Senate President

11/14/24
Date