November 28, 2001

Dear Senators:

2000-2001 was the year of the Education Governance Reorganization, a process well characterized by the inelegance of its name. It made a mockery of faculty governance statewide, at the same time that our own Faculty Senate was distanced under a new and kindred administration. When this massive encroachment of partisan politics began during Jesse Binford’s presidency in March 2000, the USF Senate issued a resolution defending the Florida Board of Regents and the integrity of the State University System. This and concurrent resolutions by other Senates around the state were cavalierly ignored by Governor Jeb Bush and legislators so intent on toppling the system that neither they nor their aides and operatives who railroaded the plan over the coming months would admit of any debate throughout the process. USF’s Interim President Peck took our resolution with him to the SUS Council of Presidents, who were then, like virtually everyone in the academic community, unilaterally in support of the status quo. But subsequent events suggest that the kind of political intrusion we hoped to deflect was already too advanced. That same Spring, the coinciding recommendations of a faculty search committee and the BOR’s own presidential search committee were disregarded in favor of a surprise appointment implemented by BOR Chair Thomas Petway III, an insider (with Bush and Sen. John Thrasher) in the Reorganization scheme. In September 2000, the pompously titled Education Governance Reorganization Transition Task Force convened, a bunch of ruling-party politicos and businessmen pointedly unqualified in education issues, innocent of understanding of the values of academic life and the liberal arts education, and dedicated to running all of education as a politically charged corporate enterprise. In early December 2000, the previously SUS-supportive Council of Presidents made a sudden 180-degree turn, coming out fully in support of the Governor’s agenda and opting for self-preservation, urging only that the hiring and firing of university presidents be given to the proposed new local Boards of Trustees. Before long, they had their wish.

Meanwhile, our gracious new President had arrived, said she was eager to work closely with the Faculty Senate, and announced her intention to attend every Executive Committee meeting as well as the Senate. The SEC was pleased. This was a promising start. We might have a friend and ally. “Administrators facilitate for faculty,” she told the Leadership Council, hosting a planning retreat at the Lifsey House on August 17, 2000, 8:30 a.m. I announced my top priority as Senate President: to smooth and effectuate as much as possible the new President’s first year at USF. In her opening address to the Senate (9/20), President Genshaft stated, as Candidate Genshaft had, that she was a strong believer in faculty governance and that her administrative style was “team oriented, collaborative, and open.” She said, “When I want to know what the faculty think, I will come to the Faculty Senate because this is the elected governing body of the University of South Florida, and I consider this group the voice of the faculty.” She was welcomed once again at the October 18 Senate, and then did not return for more than
five months, during which time she took a public position that encouraged the Reorganization, embraced
the new corporate culture, and ran quite contrary to recorded actions and discussions transpiring in the
USF Senate and every Faculty Senate in the state, and prevalent among educators at every level, as was
well known throughout the university and widely reported in the press. The University President may
convene a special Senate session at any time, but President Genshaft did not elect to do so, to find out
what the faculty thought or to justify her decidedly unpopular allegiance, nor did she attend a single
Executive Committee meeting, although she sent her Faculty Assistant, a silent auditor. She herself
stayed well insulated from personal contact.

The Education Governance Reorganization Transition Task Force met at USF on Monday, January 8,
2001, the first day of the Spring Semester, to swing its higher education framework into place. With
weeks of supposedly objective study ahead, and with those findings yet to be cast into legislation and
pass through the House and Senate prior to enactment, there were then and still are grounds for
questioning the legality of the entire process as applied to higher education. But there was nothing
tenuous about it as far as President Genshaft was concerned. She gave the Task Force a bombastic
welcome, calling their job, “one of the most important and exciting in America,” assuring the members
that she and “the USF staff [who were 80% of the morning audience] . . . are here to assist you.” In fact,
“We’re delighted you’re here,” and (after six months in office) “I hope your visit allows you time to see
our beautiful campus. Remember, USF is YOUR university, it is MY university, it is OUR university.”
She sold at length USF’s research-dollar potential and big-grant-winning research faculty, begging the
conquerors, whatever they did, not to sever USF’s regional campuses and to devolve as much power as
possible to the local level, to let the University Presidents exercise their benevolent instincts in mutual
cooperation. She threw in a word for our students at the end, but none for teaching faculty. Indeed,
given the persistent refusal of the Governor’s forces to admit any academic expertise or input, and given
the *raison d’être* of the Task Force that the education sector has heretofore ill-served the public,
President Genshaft’s great stock in their venture was an insult to the faculty of whom she had seemed so
supportive in her September remarks. When the Legislature went into session in the Spring of 2001, it
turned an already ludicrous plan into confetti, while Genshaft’s laudatory reaction made her an object of
media satire.

Eventually the system vandals won in the legislative round by sheer strength of brainless
numbers, but no one else was so eager to strew their path with roses.

What was won by this behavior? The USF President and BOT now distance themselves publicly from
the Reorganization as if she had nothing to do with it, and it had nothing to do with them, and they all
complain bitterly about our lack of equity in legislative appropriations. As of September 2001, USF
ranked eighth out of ten universities in enrollment funding. USF receives $200 less per student as
compared with the University of Florida. The way to get more funding, the President tells the *Oracle*,
is to raise enrollments. But who will hear the rising concerns of fewer and fewer faculty teaching more
and more students? . . . I have delayed issuance of this summary on the chance that some meaningful
progress would be made toward involving the USF Senate in the university’s governance process. In
my opinion that has not occurred. We are governed by a category of individuals who, regardless of the
lip service they occasionally pay, do not appreciate and will not support the values of tenure, academic
freedom, or the liberal arts.

The only recourse for faculty is the obvious political action to correct the power structure, and to rally
behind the faculty Union, which is a thousand times more effective than the Senate. That is the reason
the same forces that demolished our State University System have been busy attacking teachers’ unions
and other alliances openly and covertly, through attempted legislation and private manipulation, in the halls of Tallahassee and the halls of USF. If you don’t belong, please join. If you belong, get active.

This is a more candid letter than some will think appropriate, but in an Orwellian climate it is important to preserve events explicitly so that the experience cannot be easily overwritten by fatuous rhetoric. I intend this letter, along with the ongoing record of the following Minutes, to serve that purpose. As little as justice has been victorious for the educators of Florida this year, and as discouraging as it has been, I am grateful for the collegiality that sustained and drove this past year’s effort, and I look forward to better times ahead. I do not believe that you, my colleagues, and the people of Florida will allow this error to persist.

In Solidarity,

Nancy Jane Tyson
USF Faculty Senate President, 2000-2001

1Petway’s role in advancing Genshaft’s candidacy is documented in numerous articles, e.g.: “Genshaft Named USF Chief,” St. Petersburg Times, 3/11/00: “Genshaft made the cut only because regents Chairman Tom Petway insisted she was better than Brehm at economic development and fundraising”; and “Brennan gets the Genshaft,” Tampa Tribune, 4/1/00: “USF’s search panel did not name Genshaft a finalist. . . . But Thomas Petway, chairman of the Board of Regents and longtime ally of Republican Gov. Jeb Bush, pushed the provost of the . . . University of Albany, . . . into the final field”; even in the first line of Genshaft’s inauguration speech: “Chancellor Herbert and Chairman Petway – you recruited me for this presidency” <http://www.usf.edu/president/archive/inaug_2001.html>.

2For Petway’s role in the Reorganization see the editorial “With Friends Like These . . . ,” St. Petersburg Times, 1/9/01, comparing Petway, who “has been active in devising the reorganization plan” to “a Trojan horse, assigned the duty of dismantling the regents from within.” This was confirmed a few weeks later when the infamous “napkin” story broke, revealing how the reorganization scheme originated, in customary abrogation of the Sunshine code, as a hastily scribbled outline on the back of a cocktail napkin at a Bush/Thrasher dinner in the Fall of 1999. When the plan was later shared with Regents Chair Petway and Chancellor Adam Herbert, the latter walked away from it, but the former, who had allied with Thrasher in earlier power plays within the SUS, became an internal operative. See “Education Idea Dates to ‘99,” St. Petersburg Times, 2/5/01; and “Internet Gators Cry Foul Over Lombardi’s Departure,” Sarasota Herald Tribune, 8/29/99.


4Howard Troxler,"Plenty of Cheer and a Modicum of Substance,” St. Petersburg Times, 6/25/01. Also, “USF, Inc.” (Editorial), St. Petersburg Times, 6/27/01: “The ever-Panglossian Genshaft got an early start on buttering up her new bosses, pronouncing the new trustees ‘an awesome group. Self- preservation dictates that our university presidents avoid excessive candor in responding to the political intrusions on the state system over the past year. However, the presidents will bear the primary burden of educating the new boards. . . . Most of the new USF trustees have a steep learning curve ahead of them, but some of them may be too self- satisfied to know it.”

5Senate Executive Committee Minutes, 9/05/01.

6“Preparing for Budget Cuts,” Oracle, 9/24/01.