



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on June 12, 2019

University of Alabama Returns Largest Donation Ever, Citing Donor Interference

The University of Alabama is returning the largest donation it had ever received to a Florida businessman who recently urged a boycott of the school because its state enacted a law banning almost all abortions.

On Friday, the university's board of trustees unanimously passed a resolution remanding \$21.5 million plus accrued interest to Hugh Culverhouse, Jr., and removing his name from its law school, which will now once more be known simply as the University of Alabama School of Law.



Culverhouse pledged in September to give the university \$26.5 million, \$5 million of which had not yet been received by the school. The businessman was apparently under the impression that his contribution would grant him some sway over the law school's policies — a view not shared by school administrators.

"It has become clear that the donor's expectations for the use and application of that gift have been inconsistent with the essential values of academic integrity and independent administration of the Law School and the University," University of Alabama Chancellor Finis St. John said in a May 25 [statement](#) recommending the return of Culverhouse's contribution. "Donors," he added, "do not dictate our administration of the University."

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Four days later, Culverhouse called for a [boycott](#) of the University of Alabama and the state in which it resides, specifically because the state had passed a law prohibiting most abortions. "I cannot stand by silently and allow my name to be associated with a state educational system that teaches students law that clearly conflicts with the United States Constitution and Federal law, and which promotes blatant discrimination," Culverhouse declared.

In reality, reported Alabama news site [Yellowhammernews.com](#), "neither the University of Alabama System [nor] the University of Alabama [Law School] has advocated in any way for the abortion law."

On May 30, the law school's board of governors authorized the refunding of Culverhouse's gift. In a profanity-laced interview with the blog [Florida Politics](#), Culverhouse tried to frame the conflict with the university as mainly over abortion. The school fought back with a press release pointing out that there had been an "ongoing dispute" with Culverhouse that led him to request a \$10-million refund and that St. John had recommended doing so before Culverhouse had made any public comments about the abortion law.

"I'm sorry for the university," Culverhouse told Florida Politics, "but f*** you, and have a nice day."

Once the trustees had approved returning Culverhouse's donation, the businessman said he had "expected this response" and once more claimed it was because of the university's advocacy of the



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abortion law.

However, a June 7 [statement](#) from Kellee Reinhart, the university's vice chancellor for communications, said the trustees' decision to give back Culverhouse's contribution "was a direct result of Mr. Culverhouse's attempts to interfere in the operations of the Law School.... Any attempt by Mr. Culverhouse to tie this action to any other issue is misleading and untrue."

Two days later, the university issued a [press release](#) including 13 pages of e-mails documenting Culverhouse's attempts to influence the law school's policies. Among other things, Culverhouse wanted the law school to increase the number of students admitted, to allow him to sit in on classes at will, and to hire and fire employees at his command. Once the news of the returned donations broke, Culverhouse also sought (obviously unsuccessfully) to keep these e-mails under wraps.

"The donor's continuing effort to rewrite history by injecting one of society's most emotional, divisive issues into this decision is especially distasteful," said the university. "Our decision was *never* about abortion. It was *always* about ending the continued outside interference by the donor in the operations of The University of Alabama School of Law." (Emphasis in original.)

According to Yellowhammernews, Culverhouse's name was stricken from the school's sign "within minutes" of the board's decision to return his money, and his portrait inside the law school was removed. One observer quipped that the institution would henceforth be known as the "Who F. Culverhouse, Jr.," School of Law.

The dustup could prove to be a valuable experience for university officials. St. John pledged that they would "learn from" it, adding that they "cannot and will not compromise" the school's independence "at any price."

Image: Screenshots of [advertisements for University of Alabama Law School](#)



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