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The Departure of Larry Summers

By Anne Neal

In the wake of President Larry Summers's decision to resign rather than face a second showdown with the Harvard Faculty, one thing is clear—a vote of no confidence is in order. But the vote isn't about President Summers. Rather, it's the faculty who deserve a vote of no confidence—and members of the Corporation who would rather run than fight.

During his tenure, Summers had become the unmistakable target of the humanities faculty, who in 2005 voted no confidence in the highly accomplished professor and administrator.

From press accounts, the earlier vote was all because of Summers's off-the-record remarks regarding women in math and sciences. But a look at the actual list of faculty grievances reveals a more troubling subtext that offers

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+ penetrating insight into the
+ problems of the modern
+ academy.
+

+ Since taking office, Summers
+ has done just what the
+ Corporation wanted. He has
+ challenged many of the sacred
+ cows of the academic left and
+ addressed key issues affecting
+ Harvard University and
+ institutions across the country:
+ the lack of intellectual diversity
+ and academic freedom; the
+ dissolution of general
+ education; and hostility to the
+ military, to name only a few. In
+ speech after speech, Summers
+ had been willing to take on the
+ politically correct orthodoxies
+ of the day and offer contrasting
+ perspectives that, until
+ recently, were deemed the very
+ essence of a liberal education.
+

+ But there's the rub. Diversity,
+ and the conviction that it will
+ foster open-minded exchange
+ and free inquiry, has been a
+ shibboleth of American higher
+ education for three decades.
+ But, as Summers's remarks
+ about women so clearly
+ revealed, "diversity" only goes
+ so far. The avatars of political
+ correctness are interested in
+ exchanges of ideas, but only
+ those that accord with the
+ party line. This entire kerfluffle
+ over Summers's comments was
+ a sad commentary on the
+ intellectual rigidity of many
+ faculty, at Harvard and
+ elsewhere, and a clear case for
+ why Larry Summers should
+ have been *more* outspoken,
+

* Dean William Kirby. Kirby
* shepherded the widely
* ballyhooed faculty review of
* Harvard's core curriculum—an
* exercise that received
* considerable attention by
* institutions across the country.
* Summers outlined early his
* hopes that the faculty would
* "think more rigorously about
* the level of mastery we ask of
* our students," and that
* "achieving knowledge in key
* areas would be a crucial
* element in the general
* education component."

* Despite clear and
* commonsense guidance—
* made, it should be noted, in
* response to substantial student
* discontent about the
* inadequacy of the existing core
* —what did Kirby and the
* faculty produce? Little but a
* report ridiculed by the
* American Council of Trustees
* and Alumni, the Association of
* American Colleges and
* Universities, and the Carnegie
* Foundation for being a faculty
* wish list rather than a
* thoughtful curricular
* framework. Then again, that
* would have meant more work
* for the faculty.

* Is it any wonder that when the
* *Harvard Crimson* this week
* polled the students,
* undergraduates by a three-to-
* one margin said they wanted
* Summers to remain as
* president. In a comment that is
* striking in its honest analysis of
* *realpolitik*, Derek J. Horton '08

+ not uniformly shared by
+ everyone in the university, the
+ Corporation had an opportunity
+ to take a stand. But by cutting
+ and running—by listening to
+ the academic critics whose
+ indulgence and corruption
+ Summers knew only too well—
+ the Corporation has made clear
+ its first requirement for his
+ replacement: reformers need
+ not apply.

+ *Anne Neal is the president of*
+ *the American Council of*
+ *Trustees and Alumni.*



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