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**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, D.C. 20515**

COMMITTEE:  
APPROPRIATIONS

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PHONE: 239-5705 (313)

November 10, 1969



Gentlemen:

As a citizen, a United States Representative and a member of the House Committee on Appropriations, I am deeply disturbed that some 14 black football players have been dropped from the University of Wyoming football team for wearing black armbands. In the news accounts available to me, it appears that this action was arbitrary, provided inadequate safeguards for due process and may constitute a form of political repression. If these news accounts are accurate, then I am sure that the sense of indignation I have for these actions are shared by many other citizens.

Certainly, I appreciate the concern you and other Wyoming officials must feel in such a sensitive matter, and I further respect the difficult judgements you have to make - accordingly, before making my own judgement, it would help to have a full objective understanding of just what happened. I would certainly appreciate receiving from you a complete chronology of events that would set forth the exact circumstances surrounding this controversy.

As I understand it, these young men violated what was purported to be a standing ground-rule imposed by one individual. That this rule may have been articulated prior to the incident, does not necessarily make it right. Further, as a result of this event, these ground-rules have apparently been liberalized to provide for greater freedom of political and personal freedom in the future. This may very well be a move in the right direction, but what good this does for those just suspended, is the question. It is unfortunate that it takes such an episode to make us re-evaluate what apparently have since been recognized as unjust practices.

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If the black students are being denied the opportunity to play college football because of the political views they hold, and are expressing - with words or with armbands - then I believe a University community must come squarely, quickly and equitably to grips with this matter.

We are now at a time in this country, when Universities are fighting for the freedom and flexibility to make reforms and solve problems locally, without undue intervention from the federal government. Frankly, I feel strongly that federal "strings" attached to higher education tend to do far more harm than good. But, today, there is great danger that the federal government will become even more involved, using the leverage of funding and reporting and in shaping University policy and decisions, if the Universities themselves fail to take the initiative in correcting internal problems.

For many reasons, I personally oppose this kind of regulation and hope that it does not come about. However, as the Wyoming matter involves common civil liberties and responsibilities, I am sending a copy of this letter to Attorney General Mitchell. My objective is not that the Justice Department take action, but rather that this situation become a matter of record so that all interested parties be fully aware of the circumstances of this controversy. It will, of course, be appropriate for your reply to become a part of this file.

As you know, the Constitution of the United States sets forth certain inalienable rights which belong to all our citizens as a matter of birth. The first Amendment of the Constitution guarantees the right of free speech, and there are no provisions within the Constitution that these rights are to be abridged by arbitrary football coaches, or anyone else.

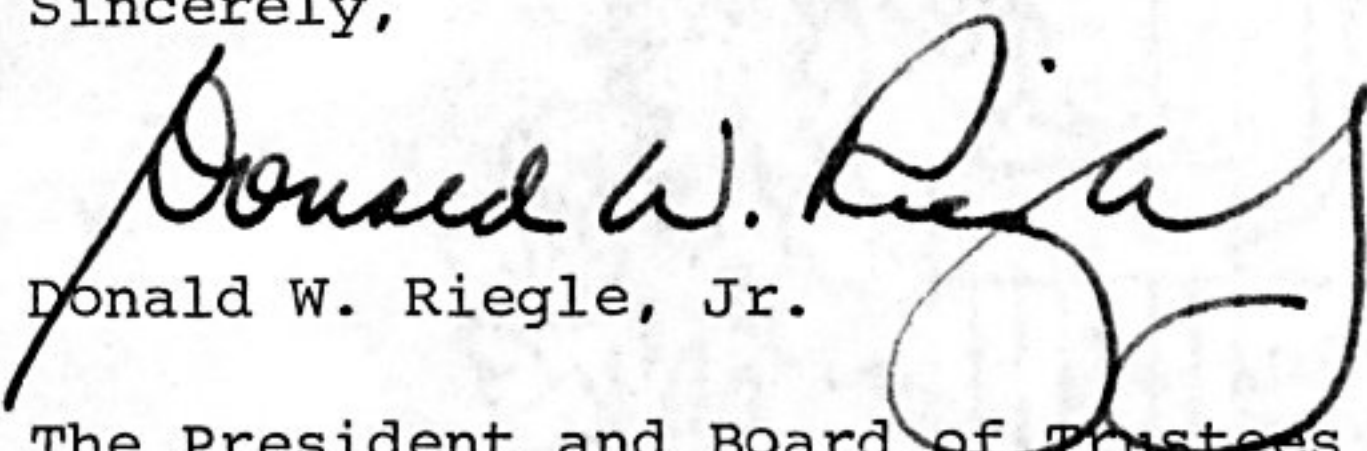
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I believe that public institutions have a special obligation to see that the laws of the land are obeyed and that the rights of all citizens are fully protected and insured.

Clearly, students are entitled to the same rights of citizenship as anyone else. A young man's college and possibly his professional football career ought not to be arbitrarily terminated because he freely exercises rights that are constitutionally guaranteed.

I know all of you share these concerns and I want to add my voice as an American citizen and public official.

Sincerely,

  
Donald W. Riegler, Jr.

The President and Board of Trustees  
The University of Wyoming  
Laramie, Wyoming

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