A CAMPUS DIVIDED

BY: GENNA CONTINO, RITA NAIDU AND TAYLOR WASHINGTON
students and faculty dispersed in May expecting to return to campus alongside an interim president and a plan to resume the search for a permanent replacement to President Harris Pastides, who retired after 11 years at the helm.

But, in July, Gov. Henry McMaster unexpectedly made phone calls to members of the board of trustees asking them to hold a meeting to vote on one presidential candidate. In doing so, he awakened a sleepy campus. At that July meeting, amid ongoing protests by faculty, staff, and students, the board appointed Gen. Robert Caslen the 29th president of USC.

This is how the events unfolded — from Pastides’s retirement announcement to the promise of CrossFit workouts on the Horseshoe.

In a letter to the editor, Stanford professor and alumnus Hakeem Jefferson said they’re focusing efforts on finding a successor to Pastides but "not a soul on this board has the passion and energy bright and bold, his infectious, his vision that people want to be connected with." He added, "When he leaves, it will be a process that’s continued even after his term ends because that’s what he asked us to do.”

Azmah said she hopes the vote on Caslen will present an opportunity for USC to reflect on its history and values, and for students to continue advocating for change.

"In the days leading up to the vote, the faculty senate passed two resolutions in opposition of Caslen’s candidacy as president of the university. The first criticized the state of the search and the second was a vote of no confidence against Caslen as a candidate for the presidency. Protesters filled into the Alumni Center holding signs. Some read “Board of directors” and “We fight back Henry Mac!” One single Caslen supporter held a sign reading “Welcome, Dr. Robert Caslen president of USC, thank you Gov. McMaster.”

"The board failed to ensure the well-being of the University of South Carolina,” Barker said. "He’s never even been an instructor, let alone a professor. He’s never even been a faculty member, and so we can’t look up to him, because he’s never even done what we’ve done,” she said.

Caslen said his biggest reason for staying at USC, even after the controversy of his appointment as president, is because he wants to help bring the campus back together. “I wanted to be a part of fixing and healing it, because I was the lightning rod that caused the conflict,” Caslen said.

"It was with these protests as the beginning,” Rankin said. "I do think the board is going to go through many problems whatever in supporting him.”

However, many faculty and students were skeptical of Caslen’s qualifications.

Student Body President Luke Rankin was one of the first to meet Caslen and said he feels the student body must come together and move forward. “I think it’s important that we all come together and move forward.”

Caslen officially began his presidency on Aug. 1, 2019.

---timeline by Erin Slavcev and photo by D’Gamecock