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*Updated 7:10 p.m. CST March 13 with comments from Miami Archbishop Thomas Wenski.*

A newly hired chief financial officer of a Catholic university outside Miami resigned Tuesday after uproar over her recent appointment to the board of one of the nation's largest firearms companies, the same company that manufactured the weapon used in last month's mass shooting at a Florida high school.

In January, St. Thomas University, in Miami Gardens, hired Anita Britt as CFO after she served a five-year stint on its board of trustees. A month later, Britt, who held the CFO position at the apparel company Perry Ellis International, joined the board of American Outdoor Brands, the parent company of firearms manufacturer Smith & Wesson.

It was an AR-15 semiautomatic rifle [made by Smith & Wesson](#) that Nikolas Cruz bought legally and used to kill 14 students and three school officials at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, in Parkland, Florida, on Feb. 14.

The news of Britt's affiliation with American Outdoor Brands, [first reported by the Miami New Times on Thursday](#), led to criticism of the university by some faculty and

students that the dual roles posed a conflict of interest, given the school's Catholic mission and stances of the U.S. bishops on gun control measures. An [online petition](#) begun in late February called for Britt to resign from the American Outdoors Brands board.

Msgr. Franklyn Casale, president of St. Thomas, attempted to assuage concerns, stating March 9 that "Ms. Britt's position with American Outdoor Brands provides her the opportunity to participate in helping the company achieve its objectives of making our communities safer and that her role with the company does not conflict with her responsibilities here at St. Thomas."

The response to Casale's conclusion, which included a resolution from a faculty executive committee in disagreement, led him to reconsider, he said in a second statement late Tuesday afternoon.

"After my statement of this past Friday, it has become clear that many of the sensible and reasonable solutions to this gun epidemic, which have been discussed previously, were becoming less and less clear," he said.

"Accordingly, yesterday I advised Ms. Britt that she needed to make a choice of either resigning her role on American Outdoor Brands, or her role as CFO at St. Thomas University, but that she could not continue on both. Ms. Britt informed me this afternoon that she has decided to resign her position at St. Thomas University. I have accepted Ms. Britt's resignation as CFO of St. Thomas University," Casale said.

In an emailed response to questions from NCR, the president elaborated on the change in his view of the matter, stating "We didn't want St. Thomas University to be associated with gun violence; it is not the image I wanted the public to perceive."

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He added that the decision was made independently by the university. The campus of 6,300 students is sponsored by the Miami Archdiocese.

Miami Archbishop Thomas Wenski confirmed to NCR in an email he was not consulted, noting that while the archdiocese sponsors the school, it is governed by a board of directors. He added he has advocated for "sensible gun control legislation

and decried the epidemic of gun violence that afflicts our culture," including during his tenure as chair of the USCCB's Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development.

The sudden turn of events stunned Darrell Arnold, a philosophy professor at St. Thomas and vice chair of the faculty forum executive committee.

"I'm very happy to see that our administration came to this understanding," he told NCR.

In an interview earlier on Tuesday, he said the issue wasn't with Britt, whom he described as having a reputation as "a very competent CFO" and smart businesswoman, but that her holding the two positions simultaneously did not reflect the university's mission, nor did it align with stances of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops on gun control.

"I don't think this is a complementary relationship for our university and something that we should be condoning," he said.

For years, the U.S. bishops' conference has supported a federal ban on all assault weapons, a position most recently [reaffirmed last week](#) in light of the Stoneman Douglas massacre. The conference has also called for limited access to certain handguns and high-capacity weapons and ammunition magazines, and has endorsed revising the age for gun ownership and universal background checks for all gun purchases.

"American Outdoor Brands is not calling for a ban on assault weapons. They're profiting from assault weapons," Arnold said.

Casale's first statement said the university was aligned with the bishops "in calling for reasonable approaches to gun violence," and directed people to a link on the American Outdoor Brands website to learn more about the gun manufacturer's support of "the development of effective solutions to make our communities safer while protecting the rights of the law-abiding firearm owner."

In one of the links, American Outdoor Brands, [responding in a March 6 letter to questions from the BlackRock Investment firm](#), expressed its support of greater enforcement of current gun laws and making improvements to the National Criminal Instant Background Check System, as well as addressing mental health and the

depiction of violence in video games and movies.

Last year, the company changed its name from Smith & Wesson Holding Corporation to American Outdoor Brands Corporation. According to its 2017 annual report, the company recorded net sales of \$773 million from its firearms segment — roughly 85 percent of its earnings.

[According to the Miami Herald](#), the company pays its board members more than \$100,000 annually in compensation.

Before the announcement of Britt's resignation, the faculty was prepared to hold a vote Thursday on the faculty forum executive committee's resolution stating it "disagrees with the administration's conclusion that at a Catholic university there is no conflict of interest between the roles of CFO Ms. Anita Britt's position at St. Thomas University and her position on the Board of Directors of American Outdoor Brands Company, which is the parent company of Smith and Wesson, the producer of the AR-15."

Arnold said the faculty would still likely discuss how or if it would respond to Britt's departure.

The initial statement from the university's president was a disappointment to Julian Montoya, a second-year law student at St. Thomas, where he also completed his undergraduate studies. "I was expecting something more Catholic" or for the administration to say it would look into the issue, he told NCR.

He too saw the situation as a conflict of interest for a Catholic university and not living up to its mission statement to develop "students who become ethical leaders in our global community."

"A Catholic university should not have someone in the chief financial position that's profiting off AR sales," Montoya said.

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This story appears in the **Gun Violence** feature series. [View the full series](#).

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