



# THE FLORIDA SENATE

Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1100

January 11, 2012

Ms. Ava L. Parker, Chair  
Florida Board of Governors  
State University System  
325 West Gaines Street, Suite 1614  
Tallahassee, Fl 32399-0400

Dear Chairwoman Parker,

We read with interest your December 24 letter to the editor of the St. Petersburg Times. As Chairwoman of the Board of Governors (BOG), your comments carry great weight concerning Florida's state university system and so it is incumbent on you to be very cautious in both word and tone as it relates to the governing of and financing of each of our eleven established and accredited universities and the possible addition of a twelfth.

First of all, we question why you, in your role as chairwoman, would write a letter to the editor, particularly without a full vote of the BOG or unanimous consent to do so. Secondly, the BOG was established to "operate, regulate, control and be responsible for the management of the whole State University System" with independence from political pressures and implications. It seems your actions are a kneejerk reaction to those political pressures.

You made several statements that we take exception to and which should be corrected. Below is our response to each portion of your opinion piece.

You stated:

The Board of Governors of the State University System of Florida takes great interest in USF Polytechnic and sees promise in this campus and its approach to research, education and job creation. After careful deliberation, the board established a process for Polytechnic, now a branch campus, to become an independent institution.

Our response:

Your use of "careful deliberation" refers to a period of two months (September 14 to November 9) to decide to make a twelfth university specializing in a polytechnic curriculum out of a branch campus of USF with roughly 1300 students who are not pursuing a polytechnic curriculum. Furthermore the proposed campus is currently undeveloped pastureland, programs had not been developed, polytechnic faculty had not been hired, poly students had not been recruited and an

REPLY TO:

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**MIKE HARIDOPOLOS**  
President of the Senate

**MICHAEL S. "MIKE" BENNETT**  
President Pro Tempore

January 11, 2012

Page 2

audit of finances under the six-year tenure of Chancellor Marshall Goodman had not been performed. It could easily be argued that a decision of that magnitude would need much more time and fact finding before it could be correctly referred to as “careful deliberation.”

You stated:

Achieving these benchmarks won't be easy — success will take skill, dedication, hard work and commitment to the transition to university status. That's why the members of the Board of Governors Special Committee on USF Polytechnic were surprised to see USF president Judy Genshaft appoint as Polytechnic's interim leader an individual who had been publicly opposed to this path of growth, development and independence.

Our response:

David Touchton is a highly respected CPA who has experience in auditing public institutions particularly colleges and universities. He is very familiar with and supportive of a healthy and vibrant USF Polytechnic University. Your statement that he was “publicly opposed to this path of growth, development and independence” is grossly inaccurate. He is indeed very supportive of growth and development and eventual independence. He has been onboard from day one for a state of the art USF Polytechnic campus. He rightfully expressed concern about the timing of its independence and the resources needed for a successful transition from a branch campus to a new campus with a new vigorous curriculum.

You stated:

The Board of Governors set benchmarks — goals the campus must reach before it can leave the University of South Florida and become Florida's 12th public university. These requirements include executing extensive planning activities, reaching adequate enrollment and meeting the full accreditation standards of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. We do not question Genshaft's authority regarding personnel matters; however, while she gave notice that she intended to fire the previous campus leader, she left Board of Governors members in the dark about his replacement. Genshaft's selection of an interim leader once viewed as hostile to Polytechnic's independence created tensions between the higher education community and political leaders — unnecessary friction that could have been avoided through collaboration and cooperation.

Our response:

President Genshaft has the duty and responsibility to hire and fire administration at branch campuses of USF. Additionally she was directed to get the USF Poly move toward independence “under control.” In fact one BOG member expressed strong reservations about the ability of Regional Chancellor Goodman to lead the effort and asked if President Genshaft was prepared to fire him. Following the Board's directive she took actions to *heal* the distrust and divisions that were caused by this surprise move for independence among the students, faculty and community that expressed strong opposition.

January 11, 2012

Page 3

After she decided to remove Chancellor Goodman she contacted each member of the BOG to inform them of her decision as a courtesy since they have no statutory authority under Section 20.155, Florida Statutes, in hiring and firing decisions. At that time, only one governor, Dick Beard, inquired as to who would be named in the interim while a national search was conducted. It seems disingenuous to say you were "kept in the dark" when she contacted you to tell you of her decision and you did not think it important enough to ask who she would be placing in the position in the interim.

You state that you "do not question Genshaft's authority regarding personnel matters" yet you hastily arranged a conference call meeting to chastise her for it.

Perhaps the most egregious statement of all was that somehow President Genshaft was responsible for creating "tensions between the higher education community and political leaders - unnecessary friction that could have been avoided through collaboration and cooperation." You show absolutely zero understanding of the community, the students and the faculty regarding the actions that have transpired unexpectedly and detrimentally to their interests. The Polk County Community was united in its support of a USF Polytechnic until the issue of independence came up. You and the BOG based your actions on a letter started by a legislator, circulated by a lobbyist and supported by a small group of 29 citizens, some of whom had financial interests in the development of the new campus. Additionally, some of that small group later said that they were expressing support of the polytechnic, not the independence of the polytechnic, and expressed the desire to remove their support. Make no mistake, the "friction" was caused by that small group that forced the issue of independence, and President Genshaft has been left to clean up that mess. Shifting the blame to anyone other than those instigating the action and those making the decision to go along does all of us a great disservice.

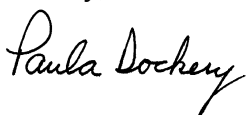
You conclude with:

The Board of Governors has outlined an exciting future for USF Polytechnic. Reaching that future requires full and active collaboration with USF's president and the Polytechnic leadership. The Board of Governors is prepared to work diligently and enthusiastically to develop Polytechnic's potential as a university, and it expects the same from the leadership of USF and USF Polytechnic.

Our response:

The faculty and staff of USF Polytechnic expressed gratitude and relief at President Genshaft's actions. Your finger pointing and placing blame does little to advance efforts of full and active collaboration when you exclude the main stakeholders in favor of powerful political forces.

Sincerely,



Senator Paula Dockery, 15<sup>th</sup>



Senator Mike Fasano, 11<sup>th</sup> District