

NICHOL RESIGNS

Abrupt end comes as BOV opts not to renew contract



File Photo

Former President Gene R. Nichol

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Gene Nichol announced yesterday via e-mail that he was resigning the presidency of the College of William and Mary, effective immediately, after learning from the Board of Visitors that his contract would not be renewed in July. Board of Visitors Rector Michael Powell, in a subsequent e-mail, stated that Dean of the Marshall-Wythe School of Law W. Taylor Reveley will be president in the interim. Mr. Nichol intends to remain as a member of the faculty at the law school.

Mr. Nichol's e-mail was sent to the entire William and Mary community early Tuesday morning. Mr. Powell's response to the unexpected announcement came less than two hours later. He explained, "After an exhaustive review...the Board believed there were a number of problems that were keeping the College from reaching its full potential and concluded that those issues could not be effectively remedied without a change of leadership."

In his statement, Mr. Nichol cites four controversial decisions of his presidency that he believes led to his not being rehired, including the removal of the Wren cross from the historic Wren Chapel and permitting the performance of the Sex Workers' Art Show. Additionally, Mr. Nichol cited the Gateway program and his commitment to diversity as another controversial decision and attitude which contributed to BOV's decision.

According to Mr. Nichol, his decisions and actions as president led to a "committed, relentless, frequently untruthful and vicious campaign" against him, which forced the BOV to not renew his contract. He accused some members of the Virginia House of Delegates of "effectively threaten[ing] Board appointees if I were not fired."

Mr. Nichol also claimed that the BOV offered both his wife and him "substantial economic incentives"

to keep the decision about his non-renewal quiet. "We, of course, rejected the offer," he said.

Mr. Powell challenged Mr. Nichol's charge that the decision made was based on ideology. "To suggest such a motivation for the Board is flatly wrong," he said. He did not respond to Mr. Nichol's other charge.

“But it is important to remember that William and Mary is stronger and more enduring than any one person or any one board.”

-Rector Michael Powell

Mr. Nichol's lengthy e-mail went on to state that he will always remember the committed students that supported him in this ordeal.

Mr. Powell addressed the expected unrest, saying that the "Board is cognizant that its decision will be deeply disappointing to many, especially members of our faculty and student body... We understand the sense of loss and will work hard to heal all wounds."

The search for a new president will begin "immediately" according to Mr. Powell. Mr. Reveley is not expected to be competing for the job as he did in 2005.

Staff Editorial: Time to move on after right decision is made

The end of the Nichol era is here. Former President Gene Nichol's e-mail yesterday announcing his resignation did a disservice not only to himself but also to the College community. Regardless of whether you believe the Board of Visitors should or should not have renewed Mr. Nichol's contract, his decision to voluntarily resign in the middle of the semester leaves the College in a lurch—and again facing a media circus. The uproar from segments of the student body and faculty is regrettable and should have been foreseen by the former president.

Mr. Nichol's e-mail to campus was irresponsible. It was a self-aggrandizing correspondence marked by severe egomania. Mr. Nichol acted unprofessionally and in a manner unbecoming of a president of the College. The sentiments contained in the e-mail prove that Mr. Nichol is more concerned about personal gain than the good of the College. The e-mail outlined a self-serving account of his tenure, ignoring the very real concerns and questions of a sizeable segment of the entire College community—including students, faculty and alumni.

This will be denied by the overwrought and hysterical students and faculty, but no amount of protests, sit-ins or strikes can obscure Mr. Nichol's lackluster record.

We call for those protesting the resignation to move on, and to recognize that no one person defines the College. These agitators have elevated Mr. Nichol to a sort of secular saint; with over 315 years of history, a mere three year tenure will mean little. The College must not succumb to the bitterness and division that Mr. Nichol's voluntary resignation has brought. William and Mary will be better off without the controversial and divisive former president.

To the students and faculty who have become unhinged by Mr. Nichol's resignation: it is time to put this in perspective. Go back to work, go back to class and let us return the College to the academic mission that defines it. This mob mentality must end.

For the critics of the BOV, let us look again to the process that led to this point. Mr. Nichol signed a three year contract and was given no other promises. This fall, the BOV announced that they would be conducting a full review of Mr. Nichol's presidency to determine his future at the College. A system was established to measure the president's performance using objective metrics and a forum for input from all members of the community. The BOV vowed to have a decision by the spring semester, and, in the end, the BOV fulfilled all

the promises made in its complete review process.

Furthermore, it appears that the BOV offered Mr. and Mrs. Nichol a "substantial"—and unnecessary—severance package. This was to be part of a transition and a dignified, graceful exit in June. The BOV did not bribe the Nichols, as some have irresponsibly accused. This fanciful notion of the existence of "hush money" is manifestly false. The word "bribe" has a specific legal definition and its casual use by those with no independent knowledge of the severance package—not to mention, the law—is potentially libelous. The concept of the severance package is a common in corporate America. Oftentimes a board of directors will offer an executive financial incentives to prevent the executive from suing for wrongful termination. This is not a bribe, and the executive, of course, has the choice to take the offer or leave it.

We are heartened that the BOV has made this positive decision when they did, and we firmly believe that it was the best decision for the College. We welcome interim President Taylor Reveley, as well as the upcoming selection process for a new president who will better lead the alma mater of a nation.