Bitterly Divided BOT Comes Close to Firing Mangum

By Tylisa C. Johnson  On October 22, 2015  Like

Florida A&M University’s sharply divided Board of Trustees came up short on two motions to fire President Elmira Mangum during an emergency conference call meeting Thursday morning. The motion to terminate Mangum’s contract with cause failed in a 5-7 vote. A separate motion to fire the president without cause failed when the trustees were deadlocked at 6-6.

Vice Chair Kelvin Lawson presented the original motion at the start of the scheduled one-hour meeting, which lasted almost three hours.

Mangum was said to have violated her employment contract by not receiving the board’s permission for the renovations to the president’s residency on campus. Mangum also was in direct violation of Florida statutes by issuing bonuses from the E&G funding, according to a report provided to the trustees.

Trustee Nicole Washington, the newest member of the board, spent a lot of time asking how it the board is holding Mangum accountable although the renovations were set to take place prior to her contract as president being finalized.

“The scope of work was [filled] out before the president actually arrived on campus,” Washington
the president be authorized or involved in purchase orders pertaining to that scope of work?"

Mangum does not believe she was in breach of her responsibility.

“My actions have always been honorable. In my 30 years of budgeting, I have never been accused of financial impropriety,” Mangum said.

Avery McKnight, vice president for Legal Affairs and General Counsel, said that according to Mangum’s contract, she was in violation by not reporting the renovations to the Board of Trustees.

“In light of what is written in the contract itself there was an affirmative duty to report any projected cost over $10,000,” McKnight said.

Board of Trustees Chair Rufus Montgomery stated, “We don’t have the information, we would likely not be here today if it weren’t for outside folks.”

Richard Givens, vice president of Audit & Compliance, said that paying bonuses out of the E&G Funds and later reimbursing them through the Foundation is a normal occurrence at many universities.

“A number of universities have paid bonuses and the bonuses take their pay from Foundation funds and if it was reimbursed timely and there was a process in place then that is a factor in determining if there would be a finding or not,” Givens said.

Trustee Spurgeon McWilliams, the only current board member who voted against hiring Mangum in January 2014, said that the motions of the BOT are not personal attacks, but instead the required duties of the board to hold Mangum accountable.

“It sounds as if it’s the board that’s doing something to [Mangum] but none of this was generated by the board,” McWilliams said.

He goes on, “This was generated from legislative inquiry that went on to FAMU and several other institutions.”

The final motion was for an outside audit of the “Reported Financial Irregularities and/or Improprieties” issues, and passed with nine votes yes.

Mangum, who took office on April 1, 2014, is the first female president in FAMU’s history. She earns $425,000 a year and has a three-year contract.

FAMU students are responding rapidly with a #StandWithMangum hashtag, and a student body meeting at 12:30 p.m. at Lee Hall Auditorium, according to a press release circulating throughout social media.

The Student Government Association also has called for Montgomery to step down from the board.