

Trustees Oust South Carolina State President

Contributed by Dante Mozie - Black College Wire
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Mixed reactions to board's abrupt action

As the fall 2007 semester came to a close, the tenure of South Carolina State President Dr. Andrew Hugine Jr. also ended, as Hugine was voted out of office Dec. 11 by the university's Board of Trustees.

The board, citing Hugine's 2006-07 performance review and an academic review of the university, voted 7-3-1, not to renew his contract, with Trustee John Corbitt abstaining, during a telephone conference meeting.

Hugine was placed on administrative leave immediately, and will serve his last day as president on Jan. 4, 2008.

Several of the board members were upset over the vote, including Trustee Charles Williams, who said that this was the darkest day in the history of South Carolina State University.

"It is the most irresponsible act," said Williams after the vote was taken. "We will all be accountable to how we vote -- not just the alumni -- to the legislature, community and the students of the university."

Williams has said he will tender his resignation from the board when the Legislature reconvenes on Jan. 8

One of the evaluations, by the Education Commission of the States, points out a number of problems that plague the school, including a high number of first-time freshmen who aren't prepared for college-level coursework and first-time freshmen retention rates that are declining as overall enrollment increases.

The report covers the period from 2000-2005. Hugine was named president in 2003.

Specifics of the other document, the 2006-07 performance evaluation on Hugine by the board, have not been released.

"Sometimes, some people don't give people enough time to do what they have to do. I really don't see a reason for his contract to not be renewed," said Sophomore Nkosi Kennedy.

Others agree, saying that Hugine is responsible for a 2007 Democrat presidential debate being held at S.C. State, an increase in enrollment and the new Andrew Hugine Suites being built.

Some students, however, said the board's decision may have been a good one.

Junior Shaunda Gilchrist said, "It's sad that it had to happen but when you do wrong, you have to pay the consequences."

Other students agreed with her, including Courtney Burgess.

"If he did something that could affect the school in a major way then it was a good decision to remove him."

But some, like Junior Tomeka Bank, say that they are not concerned.

"He didn't do anything for me, so I don't care," Bank said.

Senior Philip Robinson agreed, saying the Hugine situation "really doesn't affect me."

With many responses to this matter, the one that stood out the most was said by Junior Samuele Whaley:
"All that I can say is that I hope the next one can do better than he did."

Clyburn, the U.S. House Majority Whip and a graduate of S.C. State, sent letters urging the board not to fire Hugine. He said that Dec. 11 was a "dark day in the history of the institution."

Trustee John Bowden, who also plans to resign effective Jan. 4, 2008, said before the vote that if the board voted to oust Hugine, he would be ashamed to be a member of the board.

After the vote was taken, Bowden said he would not be "a part of this lynching."

"We don't need white people to lynch us anymore. We lynch each other," Bowden said. "I am not going to be a part of that."

The situation has been going on for over a month, beginning when rumors surfaced through e-mails between alumni and messages on alumni and fan blogs that the board had voted to oust Hugine.

In an attempt to find out if those rumors were true, students, alumni, supporters and others, including S.C. State National Alumni Association President Patricia Lott, addressed the board Dec. 9. Board Chairman Maurice Washington would not discuss Lott's questions during the meeting, but said he would respond to them in writing.

The board named Dr. Leonard McIntyre interim president on Dec. 12. McIntyre, dean of the university's College of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences, will not apply for the president's job as part of his agreement to serve as interim president. The board will conduct a national search for a new president beginning immediately.

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Dante Mozie is a student at South Carolina State University and editor-in-chief of the student newspaper, The Collegian. Jessica Toomer, Adaeze Oputa and Cara Dowling also contributed.
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