

New Chancellor Appointed at Southern-Baton Rouge

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Fisk provost Kofi Lomotey to assume post on July 1

The Southern University Board of Supervisors voted 9-6 on May 24 to hire Kofi Lomotey, executive vice president and provost at Fisk University, as chancellor at the Baton Rouge campus.

Lomotey, 57, was selected over Ray Belton, chancellor at Southern University of Shreveport, and Napoleon Moses, vice chancellor of student affairs at Alcorn State University, to replace Edward Jackson, who recently retired. Since the fall, Margaret Ambrose has served as interim chancellor.

Diola Bagayoko, professor of physics and director of the Timbuktu Academy, presented the board with a letter and a spreadsheet on the declining amount of research being done at the university and the reduced funding being received for it. Bagayoko urged the board to hire a candidate committed to increasing the university's interest in research.

He cited information from the National Science Foundation showing that as of 2003 the university was at the bottom in expenditures on research among selected historically black colleges and universities.

Jacqui Vines, vice chairwoman of the search committee, said that when Slaughter asked her to serve on the committee she was hesitant because of past events surrounding presidents and chancellors hired from within the university system without a national search.

"I did not want to be a part of any process that would not move the image forward in a positive way," she said.

Vines said that before she signed on she asked Slaughter whether he already had a candidate in mind, because "if he did, I would not be here."

Myron K. Lawson, chairman of the Board of Supervisors, asked each nominee why he wanted the position, his vision and what qualities he possessed that would enable him to lead.

Lomotey said his educational experience was the foundation of his qualities and that he was an effective leader.

"I take very seriously the notion that we are here because of the students," he said. "They are reflected in the decisions I've made."

In previous positions, Lomotey said he met with faculty one-on-one in their offices to listen to their problems. He also said he held town hall meetings with students each semester to address their concerns.

When asked what he would do to enhance the scholarship of the campus, Lomotey said he wanted to add more doctoral degrees to the academic program as a way of increasing the school's Carnegie rating, a classification system that groups universities on what is taught, to whom and in what setting.

"I want to market programs not just locally, but statewide, nationally and internationally," he said.

Unlike the two other candidates, Lomotey had been in front of the board before. In 2005 he was a candidate for the position of Southern University system president. When the board brought up his second attempt for an administrative position at Southern, Lomotey said he became interested in the campus during his time at Louisiana State University from 1992-97.

"It was the look in the eyes of the students," he said. "I was attracted to the potential of this campus. Southern is poised to enhance its reputation through scholarship. Students, thousands of graduates are ready for Southern to take off."

After an executive session, which included the candidates, Slaughter told the board the search committee was recommending Lomotey.

As the board was voting to confirm Lomotey, the vice chairwoman, Lea Montgomery, offered a motion to consider Lomotey but to defer the confirmation. The motion was voted down.

Lomotey will assume the position of chancellor on July 1.

"I am very pleased as to how things turned out," he said. "I want to get started as soon as possible."

Lomotey and his wife, Nahuja, plan to move to Baton Rouge.

"I think the process went exceptionally well," Lawson said. "The board looked at all the options and Lomotey was our choice. He is going to be a talented chancellor who is going to shock the nation."

Afi Patterson, student representative for the Board of Supervisors said she based her decision on expressed concerns by students and the community.

"I feel comfortable in my decision. Dr. Lomotey has great ideas on academic programs to bring to the university to prominence."

Jamal Taylor, current Student Government Association President and student board member-elect, is pleased with the board's choice of chancellor.

Although he was not on the selection committee, Taylor has been an advocate of the board choosing a chancellor who is qualified and is committed to returning the university into an academic-centered institution.

"I think the selection is indicative of a shift in policy and practices at Southern University and the board. We have chosen an astute academician to run an institution that clearly needs a new direction," Taylor said.

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Amber Perry is editor of Southern University's Ego magazine and copy editor of the student newspaper, the Southern Digest, which originally published this article.