

Does Higher Ed need a different type of governance?

Written by News Desk

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By BOB MARTIN, Publisher

As the problems and revelations about Alabama State University make the headlines every day or so, it has occurred to me that they probably aren't exclusive and also brings up the question of whether or not our institutions of higher learning need a different type of governance.

Perhaps it's just Alabama State, but all the problems pouring out of that school appear to be lax governance, no governance at all in some instances, or corrupt governance.

The most recent revelation at ASU this week was the payment of over a half-million dollars to a firm that cannot be located and mailed to someone or something identified as LORAC to a post office box in Roswell, Ga. This is just the latest in what has become a weekly set of events revealed that suggest deep corruption at the school paid for by Alabama tax dollars.

The Alabama State situation and similar problems at other colleges and universities in the past suggests, I believe, that we should seriously examine how boards of trustees at the state schools are selected and how much power is invested in these positions which usually come in decade-plus terms.

It has been my observation that most members of these boards are selected; (1) because they

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are alumni, prominent business people, active in the state or the local community, have inside pull with powerful alumni or political leaders, or perhaps are chummy with the current college administration. The application form, if there was one should probably carry the warning: "No common everyday folks need apply."

Some of these trustees stay on board so long that they seem to attach to themselves an ownership in the institution...and some actually do that.

By the time you read this Gov. Bentley will have already held his called meeting of the ASU Board, coming off ASU's defiant filing of a lawsuit in California against the firm hired by Bentley to conduct a forensic audit of the university, Forensic Strategic Solutions (FSS). ASU had made no objections to Bentley hiring the firm, then when the audit didn't suit the powers at ASU they changed their mind.

The university claims the auditing firm is not ranked in the top 100 auditing firms in the U. S. What they had failed to understand with regard to that claim is that FSS is not an auditing firm. It is a firm that does forensic auditing investigations where irregularities are suspected. They are exactly what are needed at ASU in light of the significant problems already uncovered at the school. The lawsuit was filed to "muddy the water" some as the school faces a continuing serious investigation.

Aside from the situation cited above, there are many other serious irregularities which have been reported and need to be investigated. For example: who opened that post office address in Roswell, Ga.?

And, just who or what is LORAC? The officials at ASU won't answer and no one can be found to provide answers. I suspect that by the time the ASU audit is completed and court proceedings get underway, there will be a great many songbirds appear.

Just have patience, Governor. By-the-way, the state operates the junior colleges and trade schools.

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Open meetings in Alabama under attack

Our State Supreme Court has made a ruling that has delivered a blow to public meetings in Alabama.

First the court decided, based on federal case law, that our legislature does not even have to hold its meetings in public and neither do they have to follow their own rules. Next the court adopted more rules to place unreasonable limits on those who can challenge those rules under our open meetings law, which, in clear English, states we can indeed bring suits to challenge such a ruling.

The Open Meetings Act provides that "the deliberative process of government bodies shall be open to the public, which is applicable to the State Legislature, but because the State Constitution gives the legislature authority to establish its own rules, it can circumvent that act. This, even though the State Constitution states that "The doors of each house shall be opened except on such occasion, in the opinion of each house, may require secrecy...."

Three justices, Tom Parker, Jim Main and Greg Shaw dissented. The rest needs a good dose of common sense applied.

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