

TSU Bill to protect student degrees passes House Committee Unanimously

(Austin) A bill introduced by State Representative Garnett Coleman, Democrat, has passed unanimously out of the House Committee on Higher Education. It now heads to Calendars Committee and awaits scheduling to be heard on the House floor for debate. The Senate Bill 2039 is the House companion to HB 4130 and it will protect the students degrees at Texas Southern University addressing the short and long-term financial problems at the university," Coleman said. I'm pleased the bill unanimously passed out of the committee and I am eager for it to come to the Fun Floor of the House for a vote. SB 2039, was authored by Rep. Coleman, Senator Rodney Ellis and Senator Royce West.

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Finding takers to lead Texas Southern University won't be easy

Even before finance scandal, few had opted to seek a spot on the board

By Matthew Tresaugue

(Houston, TX.)—Richard Holland knew little of the problems at Texas Southern University until friends urged him to be part of the solution. Because the idea of public service appealed to the Ivy League-educated management consultant, Holland applied to be a regent. Six months later, he is at the table as the state's largest historically black university ponders difficult choices for its future. The governor's office is hoping other well-qualified people follow Holland's lead. But the job appeared less than desirable even before scandals and administrative missteps prompted Gov. Rick Perry to oust the previous board last month.

State records show that fewer than 50 people applied for spots on the TSU board over the past six years, while twice as many applied for the University of Texas System's governing board in just the past year. Perry's desire to turn TSU around could hinge on his ability to recruit promising candidates to the governing board, lawmakers and education experts say. "His ability to persuade is more meaningful than the number of applications," said Richard Novak, executive director of the Center for Public Trusteeship and Governance at the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges. "If the right people are in place, they can make a difference."

The nine regents are appointed by the governor for six-year terms. The state Senate must confirm a nomination during the ensuing legislative session. Regents are not paid, but the spots usually are coveted because of the prestige. In effect, regents oversee cutting-edge scientists and potentially influence the lives of future generations. Their lengthy terms are intended to provide stability and to insulate them from politics.

But regents generally lack substantial expertise in university issues, such as enrollment, fundraising and shared governance with faculty members. Forty percent of board members said they were "slightly" or "not at all prepared" for the job, according to a recent nationwide survey by The Chronicle of Higher Education. Michael Cemo, a University of Houston System regent since 2001, said the appointment for the job, according to a recent nationwide survey by The Chronicle of Higher Education. Michael Cemo, a University of Houston System regent since 2001, said the appointment comes with a steep learning curve. Even with his experience on corporate and nonprofit boards, he needed a year of study to

understand the university's operations. The job may be even more difficult at TSU, Cemo said, because every move by the board will be scrutinized intensely by alumni, students, community leaders and lawmakers. The previous regents were sharply criticized after a series of financial and management problems, including a spending scandal that led to criminal charges against TSU's then-president, Priscilla Slade. A jury recently sentenced her chief financial officer, Quintin Wiggins, to 10 years in prison for his role in the matter. The board, which Perry appointed and later pressured to resign, included attorneys, bankers, a Methodist minister, Riverside General Hospital's chief executive and an administrator from the troubled North Forest school district.

Before resigning, regent Belinda Griffin acknowledged at a state Senate Finance Committee hearing in February that the board needed help in key areas, such as accounting.

"We could clearly strengthen the board," she said, responding to a question from Sen. Royce West, D-Dallas. Rather than add a missing ingredient to the board, Perry decided to start from scratch. He initially wanted to turn over control of TSU to one person: a state-appointed conservator.

After lawmakers balked at the idea, Perry pushed for a five-member board, which ideally would make changes more quickly than a full complement of regents.

The plan unraveled in the House shortly after he appointed five regents. So Perry has four seats to fill, but he may leave some vacant. "What's most important is that the board has a quorum, and the governor will look to fill those positions in the near future," Perry spokesman Ted Royer said. "But in terms of a timetable, his philosophy on appointees is that it's more important to get it right than to get it fast." The governor's office has received 32 applications for seats on the board over the past year. Perry could choose from Tracey McDaniel, chief operating officer of the Greater Houston Partnership business advocacy group; David Stephens, owner of automobile dealerships across Texas, and Thelma Clardy, a DeSoto city councilwoman, among others. Another applicant is Kevin Daniels, whose brother represented Wiggins in his recent criminal trial. An English professor at Prairie View A&M University, Daniels has advocated turning TSU into a private, self-sustaining institution. Big names already on board. So far, Perry has picked some prominent Texans for the board, including three from his advisory committee on TSU. Former state Rep. Glenn Lewis led the committee and is now chairman of the regents. Austin lawyers Gary Bledsoe and Richard Salwen also moved from the committee to the governing board. The governor's office recruited Javier Loya, chairman and chief executive of Choice Energy, a brokerage house for natural gas and electricity and a marketer of wholesale power.

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