

Search committee progress noted, role clarified

Editor's Note: The following statement was issued by Joel Ferguson, chairperson of the Board of Trustees and of the Presidential Search Committee.

"It is crucial that the public be aware of the progress we have made in the search for the next president of MSU. It is equally crucial to once again clarify the role of the Presidential Search Committee.

"The position of the board — as always — is to conduct the most inclusive, effective and efficient search process that will lead to the selection of the individual best suited and best prepared to be the next president of Michigan State University. This is our constitutionally mandated directive. We also consider it a moral directive.

"We have been committed to conducting this search with two overarching guidelines: 1) to comply with the Open Meetings Act and 2) to protect the privacy of candidates

and nominees to the extent permitted by law. Our resolve has not wavered and remains solid.

"We have attempted to comply with, not evade, the act. We have made commitments regarding appropriate privacy and confidentiality, and we will stand by our word, even in the face of demands to break our promise to candidates.

"It is very clear that the search process, now in a very important and sensitive stage, must continue uninterrupted if we are to select the very best person to lead MSU. Irreparable harm to the University and to the best interests of the public we were elected to serve will result from any interruption.

"This is not a personal opinion, but the view of noted experts who have conducted and analyzed presidential searches.

"Let me make one thing very clear. Any statements made to date about the progress

of the search committee — and we have made significant progress — have been made in context of our charge to recommend a slate of final candidates to the Board of Trustees, who, of course, will make the appointment of the next president.

"We have not eliminated a single candidate from consideration, although it is clear that the publication of more than 100 names of reported candidates had a chilling effect on many candidacies.

"Indeed, as we have said repeatedly, we will not eliminate any candidate until a president has been selected. In fact, we as a committee do not have the directive or even the authority to eliminate candidates.

"The role of the committee is only to recommend to the board a candidate or a slate of candidates for board consideration. Any board member may at any time add to the list a name or names to be included in a slate recommended to the board.

"Before the search process is concluded, a number of candidates will be interviewed in an OPEN meeting by a quorum of the board. As the process proceeds, the appointment of the next president will be made by the board at an OPEN meeting as originally planned.

"The Board of Trustees has not deliberated concerning the applications of candidates who have not requested closed session deliberation and has no plans to do so. I am convinced that if a quorum of the board were required to convene to interview candidates before a final slate were determined, many — if not most — qualified candidates would immediately withdraw or decline to be interviewed.

"We are committed to conducting this search to comply with the Open Meetings Act and to protecting the privacy of candidates and nominees to the extent permitted by law."