
President's Advisory Panel on University Namings and Recognitions

April 2, 2018

Turnbull Conference Center, Room 214

1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Panel Attendees:

Members

President John Thrasher

Renisha Gibbs- Chair

Miguel Hernandez

Maxine Jones

Karen Bearor

Walter Moore

Norman Anderson

Janet Stoner

Lane Forsman

Allisson Yu

Kyle Doney [via phone conference]

Support Staff

Elizabeth Hirst

Danni Staats

Rebecca Peterson

The meeting began at 1:01 p.m.

1. Welcome

Renisha Gibbs, Panel Chair, welcomed the panel to the meeting. She reported that the Town Halls, which took place a few weeks prior to the meeting, were productive and essential for getting feedback from the community. She welcomed President Thrasher to the meeting. She reminded the panel and the audience that the University highly values debate and discussion, but that courtesy and respect during those processes were also valued. She asked that all parties keep that in mind and to show respect in all interactions, including responses to public comments.

2. Public Comments

Ms. Gibbs stated that the panel would first welcome any public comments. She reminded everyone that the public comments should be three minutes or less.

[Comment #1]

Adam Wood introduced himself as an FSU student that has attended the University for six years, as both an undergraduate and then a law student. He stated that his best years have been at the University, and that his comments come from a place of both love and respect. He stated that he believed [you] cannot have it both ways when it comes to these issues, clarifying that he did not

believe history could be “chosen” but the University could choose who is commended for their part in history. He opined that the University cannot choose to advertise diversity and an inclusive learning environment but then honor someone who held “backwards” opinions and was a segregationist. He continued that monuments last forever, but the people who inspire them do not. He concluded that he did not believe that B.K. Roberts or Francis Eppes best embody the values that the University showcases and states that it fosters.

[No further comments at this time; comments continued at end of meeting]

3. Comments to Panel – President Sandy D’Alemberte

President D’Alemberte thanked Chair Gibbs for inviting him to speak with the panel. He introduced himself as the former Dean of the Law School, the former President of Florida State University, and stated that he also had a law teaching career and owned a law practice. He stated that he understood the concerns and issues that people are having with the naming of the building in the law school after B.K. Roberts and the Eppes Statue and building.

President D’Alemberte discussed his understanding with the issue of naming and that it goes back to the Civil War and that period of time. As an example, he stated that there are ten army bases named for confederate generals and he did not believe that was a good idea, especially since the bases were named after some of the “worst” generals. He cited Fort Benning and clarified that General Benning sponsored the idea of leaving the union, in addition to evidence that he may have been a leader of the KKK organization. He stated that the University is fortunate to not have any issues on campus with namings for confederate generals. He mentioned that there may be an issue with the ROTC battle flag that commemorates the Battle of Natural Bridge, which took place just south of Tallahassee. He explained that there are myths surrounding the flag, and his view was there should be some way to explain those myths and explain why ROTC uses the flag.

President D’Alemberte went on to discuss the reasons the University decided to honor Francis Eppes. He referenced a research paper written by Mike Rashotte [*FSU’s Origin in the 1850s: Appreciating the Roles of Tallahassee’s City Council, Prominent Citizens, and Enslaved People*] and stated he recommended reading the article. He explained that Eppes was an Intendent [mayor] that wanted to establish a seminary of higher education on the west side of the Suwannee River and was one of the members of the board governing the west seminary that later became Florida State University. He continued that Eppes was a good manager and got the seminary through many difficulty times in order to get it established and running properly. President D’Alemberte referenced the Rashotte paper, stating that his historical account is accurate and that Rashotte is also accurate in stating he did not cover all of the relevant information in his address. He admitted that when he was President the conversation about Eppes should have included a fuller picture. He stated that he accepted the information he was presented at the time, without conducting his own research, and he therefore inaccurately identified Francis Eppes as the “founder” of FSU. However, President D’Alemberte clarified that even though that is the case, he still believes Eppes should be honored because of his significant contributions in establishing the seminary. He recognized that Eppes was a slave owner and opined that should be recognized in some way to give the full picture. He stated that he cannot defend that history, but that the history is consistent with many people during that time. He stated that history is not always perfect, using street names

as an example. He stated that his office sits on the corner of Jefferson street and MLK Boulevard. Neither Thomas Jefferson or Martin Luther King were perfect people, but yet they are honored for their contributions.

President D'Alemberte further explained that he has always been very conscious of FSU's history, as his mother attended the State College for woman, and that he started doing a serious of memorials on campus to honor history. He stated that he brought one of the feathers from the headdress of the Dobbie Flowers statue, which honors her as FSU's first black homecoming queen.

[Feather passed around to panel]

He concluded his views on Eppes by stating that he deeply cared about FSU as an institution and he wanted to make a case to keep the statue of Francis Eppes. He explained that despite his faults, he was the grandson of Thomas Jefferson and made major contributions to the University.

President D'Alemberte then addressed the building named after B.K. Roberts and wanted the panel to know that in reality, he and Roberts did not get along well. When he finished law school, Roberts was the Chief Justice and offered him a job. He clarified that while he did admire many things that Roberts did in his judicial career, he believed his opinion on the Hawkins case was wrong, and that he got it wrong at a time when he should have been able to get it right. He did further explain that he believed if anyone was to take a name for the building at the law school, B.K. Roberts was critical in the establishment and initial operation for the school, and therefore, he had to be the one it was named after. He opined that the panel should recommend to keep the name on the building, but to have a larger narrative explaining why. He raised the money to buy the original library books, he got the school running in a year when it should have taken five years. He stated these are the things that the panel should consider.

President D'Alemberte also mentioned that overall he was in favor of leaving the names on the buildings and the statue of Eppes, but mentioned that he questions why the University has not honored LeRoy Collins, who was also integral in the history of FSU.

Ms. Gibbs asked if the panel had any questions.

Miguel Hernandez asked if President D'Alemberte was aware of a connection between the closing of the FAMU law school and the opening of the FSU law school.

President D'Alemberte responded that although they were close on the historical timeline, the fact was that FAMU was not getting enrollment and that is why it was closed. He stated he did not believe the two incidents were connected. He explained that he did know that when FAMU law school was later re-established, it received great support from FSU law school.

Norman Anderson stated that he appreciated the President's candor about the naming of the Eppes building and the creation of the statue and the admission that he wished he had had a more complete history. He asked President D'Alemberte if in retrospect, he wished he would have done anything differently.

President D'Alemberte responded that he could have done a better job about laying out a narrative and given credit to a larger group of people instead of just naming Eppes as the founder. He stated he believe in general there needed to be a better job of explaining history. As an example, he cited that there were beautifully crafted houses on Landis Green that were built by slaves, who have never been formally acknowledged for their work and craftsmanship, but perhaps they should be.

President Thrasher thanked President D'Alemberte for speaking to the panel. He stated that he asked him to come share his views with the panel, as his history and his knowledge of the University is extensive. He stated that he also appreciated D'Alemberte's candor. He concluded by stating that the panel has put in a lot of work into researching the issues and his hope was that a resolution could be reached.

4. Comments to the Panel- Fred Baggett

Fred Baggett introduced himself as a colleague of B.K. Roberts, a practicing lawyer in Tallahassee for over 45 years, and a graduate of the College of Law. He stated that worked with Roberts for more than forty years, and his very first job was working for Roberts after he was introduced to him in 1970 and worked as a law clerk. He started his own practice in 1973 and Judge Roberts joined him in 1977 and they began their own law firm with three others [Roberts, Miller, Baggett, and LaFace]. He explained that he wanted to speak in support of Roberts, because he knew him personally and that no one had more heart and soul than Roberts. He stated that the criticism directed at Roberts throughout the proceedings of the panel were as a result of the Virgil Hawkins case. He clarified that he was not speaking to the panel to defend those cases or Robert's opinions on those cases. He stated that those decisions were made consistent with what was then the Florida Constitution that had established a standard of "separate but equal". He said that things later changed, and rightly so, when the Florida constitution was changed to just "equal". He felt that the Florida Supreme Court had a hard time recognizing that, and that Roberts offered two opinions that the Supreme Court concurred with at the time. He stated he believed those opinions were not only wrong legally, but also wrong morally. However, he did not think that should be the only legacy of B.K. Roberts and he wanted to review some of his tremendous contributions. He cited several examples:

- 1963- Gideon v. Wainwright- historical landmark decision in U.S. Supreme Court that the Constitution provides an attorney to defendants in criminal cases who are unable to afford their own attorneys. Baggett stated that Roberts, under that opinion, initiated the effort in Florida to create the Florida Public Defender system, which is recognized as one of the finest systems in the U.S.
- 1970- Roberts worked with the legislature and passed a simplified system of courts that is the same system that is used today
- Roberts served as the Chairman of the Human Rights Committee and has been described as a passionate activist.
- Roberts was published thirty-seven times in the American Law Reports which publishes landmark and meaningful cases, and he was the most published judge at that time.
- Roberts was a first amendment judge, he believed in the Worker Compensation laws, and he was a life-long supporter of the University.
- Establishment of FSU Law School- In 1964, a team of legal education consultants were engaged by the state and in conjunction with law school consultants, they recommended

an increase in funding for the law schools and recommended the creation of the FSU law school no later than 1970. The Board of Regents [Board of Governors] created a committee and named Roberts as the Chair. By 1966, the law school at FSU was operational. This happened in a year, and it was because of the commitment of a group of people lead by Judge Roberts.

- Before Roberts became a judge, he represented Edward Ball who was the managing director of the Alfred DuPont Foundation. Roberts convinced Ball to donate \$70,000 to open the library.

Mr. Baggett concluded by stating that B.K. Roberts left more of a legacy than the two cases that are referenced. He stated his belief was that the building at the law school is appropriately named because no one did more for the law schools success and purpose than B.K. Roberts.

Ms. Gibbs asked Mr. Baggett if he knew if Roberts ever gave additional thought to the Hawkins case since it was done early on in his career.

Mr. Baggett stated that although he personally did not speak with him about it, he had read in some documents that Roberts stated he would have met with Hawkins.

Dr. Anderson asked Mr. Baggett if he knew if Robert's avocation for human rights including consideration or differentiated between races.

Mr. Baggett responded that he did not have any evidence that he differentiated between races in regards to human rights.

Break 2:00 p.m.

Return from Break 2:09 p.m.

5. Current Issues Report

Ms. Gibbs stated that the blue folders that were provided to the panel contained the articles Robyn Jackson had found on current issues, which were also distributed via email. She asked the panel to review the articles in preparation for the process of determining a recommendation.

6. Town Hall Feedback

Ms. Gibbs explained that the feedback received at the town halls was critical, but that the attendance had been limited and inconsistent, noting that one of the sessions had only one speaker, while the rest had around ten to fifteen and the feedback was not very diverse. She explained that since the town halls, the panel had received many comments via the website and that the most up to date feedback had been provided to the panel. She stated that the comments from the website were much more diverse and expressed many different views, which encourage the panel to explore different avenues.

7. Next Steps

Ms. Gibbs indicated that the panel should now be developing a game plan on how to move forward. She stated that she had one outstanding guest speaker that would attend the next meeting to answer the panel's outstanding questions that they had been asked to submit previously. The speaker is a graduate assistant with the history department. Ms. Gibbs stated that she did not receive many questions from the panel and took that to mean that the panel is getting close to discussing the recommendation to the President.

8. Next Meeting Agenda

Ms. Gibbs suggested that the next meeting agenda involve discussion with the panel on options for B.K. Roberts Hall, the Eppes Building, and the Eppes statue. In that discussion, the panel could make policy recommendations. She also suggested that staff could work on policy language options during the summer for consideration by the panel in the Fall. She emphasized that she wanted to ensure everyone on the panel had an opportunity to weigh in before any recommendations for policy changes were drafted.

Janet Stoner clarified that her understanding of what Ms. Gibbs was suggesting was that the panel would separate their recommendation on the specific landmarks from their recommendation on policy changes and the goal was to give President Thrasher recommendations on the prioritized landmarks by the end of spring semester and to finalize a policy recommendation in the fall.

Ms. Gibbs confirmed.

Dr. Stoner stated that if the panel has discussed the general policy recommendations, she was supportive of staff working on policy language over the summer.

Ms. Gibbs stated that for the next meeting, everyone should be ready to discuss recommendations and that all items have been read and all are prepared for meaningful discussions. She offered to lay out the options for what other institutions have done and then would look to panel to weigh in.

Dr. Stoner confirmed she was in support of that plan. She asked what Ms. Gibbs envisioned them needing to prepare or draft on the three specific landmark recommendations.

Ms. Gibbs stated that although an in-depth discussion hadn't occurred on that specifically, she envisioned a recommendation statement that everyone could weigh in on.

Dr. Stoner agreed that one policy statement, laying out some specifications on requirements for a recommendation would also be helpful as what the panel does may become a model for other panels.

Dr. Anderson stated that draft recommendations needed to come hand in hand with interim policies and/or procedures.

Ms. Gibbs agreed but clarified that the standards could be developed and the details of the policy could be worked through later.

Mr. Hernandez asked if the Seminole Creed would influence how the panel would craft their recommendations, and if those were the principles they needed to consider.

Ms. Gibbs answered that the Creed was important but she envisioned the principles to be broader and wanted to look at hard concepts like other institutions have done. For example, the principle of putting things into the context of that time. She also stated that principles could have moral perspectives in them and should be specific to FSU, but not limited to the Creed.

Walter Moore asked if there was anything Ms. Gibbs needed from panel members for preparation of next meeting.

Ms. Gibbs offered to send out summary of what to expect at the next meeting, but in general to expect discussions on options such as renaming, contextualizing, relocating, or doing nothing.

Dr. Moore clarified that Ms. Gibbs was saying the panel needed to be ready to decide that.

Ms. Gibbs confirmed it was time for the panel to move in that direction.

Maxine Jones asked if they could find out when the Seminole Creed was written.

Ms. Gibbs confirmed they would research and try to find out.

Allison Yu asked for clarification on what the speaker at the next meeting would be presenting.

Ms. Gibbs clarified that he was a historian, versus an archivist who previously spoke, and would be answering specific questions that were asked by the panel.

Dr. Anderson commented that he agreed having a historian would be helpful and stated that after today's presentation he had additional questions.

Ms. Gibbs asked Dr. Anderson to send the questions to Danni Staats, Staff Support, so they could send to the speaker.

Dr. Jones asked if they could check into whether or not there is a building on campus named after LeRoy Collins.

Ms. Gibbs confirmed.

9. Public Comments Continued

[Comment #2]

Kacey Johnson introduced herself as a 4th year undergraduate at FSU. She stated that her main concern was that, although she understood history is important, she wanted the panel to consider how students of colors at the University must feel. As an example, she stated she was peacefully protesting and a white student asked her, "Do you even go here?" She stated that the view that

racism is not involved in these issues is “ludacris”. She asked that the panel keep that in mind in their recommendation for future policies.

[Comment #3]

Stefan Babin introduced himself and a current student in Criminology and Political Science. He stated that he felt the low turnout of the town hall shows that most people are not offended by the landmarks on campus. He clarified that there is a small group of people are offended only. He stated that in reviewing removing history, the university needed to be careful about the criteria and the requirements for that. He asked if the university wanted to change landmarks that were representative of their time period, would we then remove any reference of the founding fathers, or Franklin Roosevelt. He stated it was a slippery slope and asked where the line ended. He stated that it is not about glorifying bad practices but being objective and remembering history. He suggested that the University needed an objective record and needed to consider the “big picture”.

[Comment #4]

Zachary Schultz stated he felt the presentation by President Sandy D’Alemberte was very interesting. Although he had not read the paper that he referenced, the points were valid and what has been said for a long time, which is that the choice to make Francis Eppes the “founder” of FSU was an arbitrary one. The role of Eppes in slavery was “glossed over”. He stated he wants to see the focus on the study of the history of the University and does not think these men should have been given honors when human rights were violated in such a horrible way. He opined that if we are so willing to gloss over obvious cases of oppression, it calls into question the University’s preparation for students to deal with oppression. It sets the tone for the whole University.

[Comment #1 Continued]

Adam Wood stated he wanted to address the comment made by Stefan Pabin regarding the amount of people who may feel offended and then attended the town hall. He clarified that if Facebook comments were reviewed, it was a very divisive issue. He stated the panel should consider that many people have opinions but they may fear their internships or other items might be jeopardized.

Ms. Gibbs stated there were no further comments and she looked forward to seeing everyone next meeting.

Meeting Adjourned at 2:45 p.m.