

Garrison responds - 04/25/08
By Emily Corio

Anchor: The day after the WVU Board of Governors released the investigative panel's report, there was talk of resignations. Newspaper editorials called for the resignations of top WVU officials who made the decision to award Gov. Joe Manchin's daughter, Heather Bresch, an MBA degree without proof that she earned it. But WVU President Michael Garrison says he wants to take his time in reviewing how the decision was made. Meanwhile, he's not concerned about the status of his own job. Emily Corio interviewed Garrison and has more.

Corio: WVU President Michael Garrison says he kept himself out of conversations that led to the decision to retroactively award Heather Bresch an MBA degree last fall, but now he plans to hear from those administrators who were directly involved.

Garrison: I need an opportunity and I don't want to be hasty about any of this, but I need an opportunity to talk to the individuals who were involved with the actual decision making process, haven't done that. I will do that now. I wanted to wait to review the committee's report and found some things from the report that you know I was not aware of but I'll make sure those things are remedied.

Corio: What are some things that you weren't aware of?

Garrison: Well, I think you know, you've got to take a look at anytime you try to determine what happened ten years ago, you've got to go back and talk with faculty that were actually involved during that process. It doesn't appear that that was done. To me that seems like something that should be done, should've been done, and so those are things, you've got to have a process in place, as the panel suggests to make sure that those things will be done in the future and that there no decision will be made until those things are done.

Corio: So, you weren't getting updates when they were making these decisions?

Garrison: Not at all. Not at all. No updates. And in fact, again, I want to be as clear as I can be, this was something, once we learned what the situation was, that I handed off and I would normally hand off to the academic unit.

Corio: But it's pretty usual for a student to be able to call you directly and talk to you, so that kind of gives the impression that she had a direct line to you.

Garrison: Yeah, it's actually not unusual. She's a former student, for one, but even current students. My e-mail's public. I get a lot of calls. I get a lot of walk-in students who say they have this issue or that.

Corio: How do you respond to a section in the report that talks about, that people felt pressured that they had to side with Bresch's story?

Garrison: I never. To this day, I've never spoken to Dean Sears about the matter. I've never spoken to Paul Speaker about the matter. In fact, one of the reasons I removed myself, beyond the fact that as president I don't make academic determinations, is that you know, I knew who the individual was and it wouldn't have been appropriate to be involved. I exerted no pressure, nor did I direct anyone to exert any pressure, to do anything one way or the other, other than to handle the matter as they best could.

Corio: When Board of Governors Chairman Stephen Goodwin read you a directive, part of it said you must take responsibility for what happened. In light of that, do you feel like your job is threatened?

Garrison: I don't feel like my job is threatened. I do feel that as president, as the saying goes, the buck stops with me. I feel responsible to implement the panel's recommendations. I feel responsible to make sure this never happens again. I feel responsible to talk with the folks who actually made the decisions, to work through all those issues. But no, I don't feel that my job is threatened.

Corio: Are you at all embarrassed by this?

Garrison: On behalf of the University, I'm regretful. I'm very regretful about this, and I think you can talk to anybody who knows me, I'm an extremely proud graduate, two-time graduate of this University, very honored and humbled to be selected as president, more than that though, if you take that away, I'm more proud of my degrees from here. And I worked very hard to get them. I worked my way through school, I was the first person in my family to graduate from college, so I fiercely defend what it means to hold a degree here. I feel I think like a lot of other alumni from WVU feel, but my job's very different. My job's to make sure this doesn't happen again.

Corio: Garrison must present a progress report to the Board of Governors in June on his implementation of the investigative panel's eight recommendations.
For West Virginia Public Broadcasting, I'm Emily Corio in Morgantown.