Searching for Authement's Successor

Ray Authement leaves enormous shoes to fill. Since Authement announced his impending retirement last week, have been hard-pressed to find a single person who has impacted Acadiana's educational and economic well-being more than the longtime university president. His commitment and dedication to the university and the community have been exemplary, for more than three decades as university president, Authement has made few missteps. His contribution to the reins and building on Authement's success will take time — lots of it.

For that reason, anything less than a bonafide national search for a new president of UL Lafayette is unacceptable. The Board of Supervisors for the UL System — 11 of 16 are Gov. Kathleen Blanco's allies. What this calls for is a search committee, a majority of which will be appointed from the existing board, and the non-voting chair of the Board of Supervisors' chairman. The voting members of the search committee will recommend to the full board, which has the final say in who gets the job. Those on the search committee with the votes include Comptroller Jimmy Long Sr. of Natchitoches, should lead the way among UL leaders and leaders of the community at large to ensure that the new president has the interests of academia and Acadiana at heart.

Additionally, let's hope Clausen has learned from his recent experience with LSU's System. Just last year, Clausen endured immense criticism after two state legislators charged that LSU System President William Jenkins was forced out by board Chairmen Bernie Bouldreux — Clausen's boyfriend — to pave the way for his ascension to the more prestigious LSU post. As a result of that fiasco, Bouldreux resigned from the board in March 2006, a month before Jenkins tendered his resignation, and Clausen stayed put as head of the UL System. Moreover, Clausen should learn the importance of avoiding the appearance of a tainted process in selecting Authement's replacement.

Potential local candidates for the job include Commissioner of Higher Education Joseph Savoie and UL Vice President of Academic Affairs Steve Landry, both of whom are well respected. If they seek or are nominated for the position, they should have plenty of competition. According to the UL System's rules, the board must conduct a national search for presidential vacancies, a process that in the past included print advertisements in the Chronicle of Higher Education, Women in Higher Education, and Diverse Issues in Higher Education. The system's "best practices" call for the ads to run for six weeks and for the university's Web site to be linked with the university's Web site to provide information about the position and the search process. With today's technology and Internet and the rules that the university has the ability to reach a substantial pool of potential applicants from around the country. The only way to ensure that the search for our university is to determinately search for one.

Once the semifinalists and finalists are selected, the interviews "should be concluded in a public setting," according to the system's best practice guidelines. Let's hope that's the case.

To qualify, those candidates must have a doctorate from an accredited institution and successful experience in an institution of higher education, but the rules allow for one or both of these requirements to be waived in exceptional cases for a candidate having an extraordinary record of leadership and accomplishments. "We should be focused," the Chapman said. "We hope the institution has the qualifications for a position this critically important to a university so vital in the education of our children and future of our economy.

As soon as Blanco appointed on March 20 that she would not seek re-election, speculation began circulating that Authement would retire. However, only a few weeks before that, on March 6, the governor's spokeswoman told The Independent Weekly: "The responsibility lies with the respective management board to name their new president. There are so many issues shaping the end of her term, and should honor the system and stay out of the search process.

For his part, 78-year-old Authement should also remove himself from the proceedings except to ensure a smooth transition for his successor. He has served the university well and has a long list of worthy accomplishments — but the time has come for him to step aside. Perhaps he has already stayed too long. Had Authement bowed out at the university's centennial celebration in 1999, a milestone that also marked the success of his dogged effort to rename the university UL Lafayette, he could have kept the University Art Museum and horse farm property find leaves the title to the transparency.

Determinedly search for a new president of UL Lafayette is unacceptable.