

Case Study Board Member Gone Rogue

Scenario

One of the senior members of the board is a retired journalist. At the request of the governor, he served a two-year term as chairman of the board. While chairman, he was professional in his demeanor and circumspect about the issues that he would share publicly and how he would share them. With the election of a new governor, the board chair was asked to step down, so that a new appointee to the board, with the new governor's blessing, could step in as board chair. The former chair remained a member of the board, but was no longer serving as chair or vice-chair.

The anger and frustration of the former board chair became obvious when sensitive issues, including personnel issues, that came to the board, often in executive session, began to show up on the pages of the local newspaper. Details that could only have been obtained from a board member were obvious, and the former chair, when asked about this, was very forthcoming about his perceived need to "be transparent" about governing board work to any and all who might ask. Citing First Amendment rights and the public's right to know, and using language that was "colorful" (and offensive to some board members), the former board chair insisted that it was his right to speak with "the public" about any business pertaining to the University.

Board members and the University President were understandably concerned. No one wanted to share any information with this board member going forward, least of all information that

might be negative or potentially damaging to University personnel or to the overall reputation of the University. Instead of open sharing of the challenges facing the University, the President and his staff were now very wary of sharing details or asking for advice on issues that were clearly relevant and of interest to the Governing Board.

Questions to consider:

What might/can the board and/or board leadership do in a situation like this?

What are the main issues that need to be addressed?

What advice could the board give to the President and his staff?