

Reform group urges changes in election of Baylor regents

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WACO—A reform group called on Baylor University to enact major governance changes, including a plan to allow Baylor constituencies to elect a majority of the board of regents and a policy requiring regents to conduct much of their business in open sessions.

Bears for Leadership Reform—an organization that includes prominent Baylor alumni and donors—announced its “roadmap for governance changes” Jan. 18.

Soon after the reform group addressed the news media, Baylor released a statement from Ron Murff, chair of the board of regents, saying regents will vote Feb. 17 on changes to bylaws and guidelines for board operations, as recommended by a governance-review task force created in November.

‘10-10-10-4’ governance proposal presented

Saying some current regents have “turned a deaf ear to the Baylor Family,” former regent Randy Ferguson of Austin presented the reform group’s “10-10-10-4” governance proposal.

It calls for 10 regents elected by the Baptist General Convention of Texas, 10 elected by Baylor alumni and 10 elected by the full membership of the board of regents, with one each elected by the “B” Association board of directors, the Baylor Bear Foundation board, the Student Congress and the Faculty Senate.

Under the proposal, all 34 members would have full voting privileges. Currently, the faculty, student, former athletic lettermen and foundation

representatives hold nonvoting advisory seats on the board.

“We want to give more representation to the Baylor Family,” Ferguson said.

The governance reform proposal takes away from the board their right to reject a regent elected by the BGCT. All regents other than the Student Congress representative would serve three-year terms and be eligible to serve a maximum three terms. No regent could serve more than two years as chair of the board.

The proposal calls for the regents’ executive committee to be disbanded and stipulates no committee would have the power to take action on behalf of the board.

Policy changes recommended regarding transparency

The proposed plan also includes a set of transparency policies, including requirements to:

- Conduct board of regents meetings in open session, except for adjournment to executive session to discuss confidential matters concerning personnel, legal matters or property acquisition.
- Publish board meeting dates, agendas and minutes, as well as all university governance documents.
- Identify board committees, indicate who serves on which committee and tell what each committee does.
- Drop the demand that regents sign a nondisclosure agreement.
- Make regents available to the news media after board meetings.

“Baylor should become the new leader of private universities in America in terms of open conversations and open meetings, to the extent that it makes sense,” said John Eddie Williams of Houston, president of Bears for Leadership Reform.

Baylor and its board should “not just match” what other private schools are doing but “become the leader in transparency and accountability,” he said.

Some current regents have expressed concern a small number of board members who are “in the know” make most of the important decisions and keep information from other regents who are kept “on the fringes,” Williams asserted.

Reform group wants to meet with regents

Bears for Leadership Reform did not set a deadline for regents to respond to the governance proposal, but its leaders hope to meet with representatives from the board of regents as soon as possible.

“We are available any time on short notice,” Williams said.

Representatives of the reform group and the board of regents last met Dec. 5. At that time, Bears for Leadership Reform called for a [comprehensive third-party investigation](#) into events surrounding the sexual violence scandal at Baylor, including the regents’ and administration’s response to it.

The following week, the regents [reaffirmed their confidence](#) in the original Pepper Hamilton investigation into sexual abuse at Baylor. After hearing from a committee formed to review the methodology, scope and findings of the Pepper Hamilton probe, the board concluded the investigation was comprehensive, unbiased and professional, and regents voted unanimously against engaging another firm to review the investigation.

Regents receive recommendations from task force

In November, Baylor’s board of regents announced plans to [make public](#) the minutes and agendas of future meetings and noted regents created a governance-review task force to recommend changes to board practices

and procedures.

The task force delivered its final report to the board's governance committee Jan. 16. It included 30 detailed recommendations for changes to bylaws and guidelines for board operations, Murff said. The next day, the committee reviewed the report and instructed attorneys to draft a range of bylaw amendments for the board to consider at its Feb. 17 meeting.

"The task force report will be provided to all regents so that they have ample opportunity to evaluate the recommendations in advance of our board meeting," Murff said, noting the full report will be published online within the next week.

"I have been greatly impressed by the comprehensive work of the task force in compiling its report," he said. "I am extremely grateful to these men and women for devoting so much of their time to produce a thorough and unsparing assessment of our governance policies and procedures. Their work included extensive reviews of the way similar boards operate at other private universities, as well as at for-profit and not-for-profit institutions. They also sought input from expert consultants and experienced board leaders across a wide range of successful organizations.

"Both the Baylor family and the public should know that the process of continual board assessment and improvement will always be an integral part of normal operations at Baylor. We will follow well-established procedures for changing our bylaws in an expeditious manner."

The board of regents needs to enact major reforms if it expects to regain the trust of significant segments within the Baylor's constituencies, Williams asserted.

"At some point, they will have to respond," he said. "We are not going away. We will be here until the job is done. The Baylor Family will not be ignored."