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SECOND PRESS ADVISORY

The Presidential Appointment at Gallaudet

The general reaction to the appointment of Alan Hurwitz to the president's position at Gallaudet has been low-key, as expected. In terms of negative, or critical remarks, so far only one video blog in the Deaf blogosphere has expressed a mild criticism of Dr. Hurwitz, saying (signing, in ASL) that Dr. Hurwitz has a reputation at NTID of taking too long to move forward on reforms that everyone knows have to be made, in this instance the matter of the necessity of removing Alexander Graham Bell's name from a dorm building.

In addition to that one video blog with the one mildly critical remark of Dr. Hurwitz, one website owner has, as seems apparent, attempted to drum up viewership ratings for his website by passing on unfounded rumors and by misinterpreting (and even misquoting) an editorial which was issued on this listserv last Friday, two days before the Board's announcement on Sunday of the selection of Dr. Hurwitz.

To explain the selection of Dr. Hurwitz to those members of the media unfamiliar with the political situation, a rough parallel can be drawn to some general aspects of the Nixon-Ford-Carter succession in mainstream politics, with President Nixon leaving the political scene under a cloud of suspicion and overall disgrace, then Ford serving the role of reestablishing integrity, then Carter appearing on the scene as a Washington outsider. This is roughly analogous to the succession of Jordan, Davila and Hurwitz at Gallaudet, as the eighth, ninth and tenth presidents.

Though Dr. Hurwitz has served as President of the National Association of the Deaf, he never attended Gallaudet and so has no political encumbrances relating to Gallaudet politics. While it is likely that a variety of social-political considerations were in play during the selection process (ethical or otherwise), this "no prior encumbrances" factor appears to have

been the factor which played the dominant and determinative role in his selection.

There is widespread agreement in the Deaf world on the nature of Gallaudet University's role within the Deaf community and within American society as a whole, serving a role analogous to the role that historically Black colleges and universities play as part of the Black Community, in terms of creating a space where students who are a minority within the general population can take advantage of an educational environment where social pressures along the minority-majority axis are not present, thereby enabling a distraction-free path toward accelerated learning in a socially and psychologically wholesome atmosphere.

While there are many HBCU's, there is only one Gallaudet. This intensifies Gallaudet's importance and propels it to a level of serving as the center of Deaf culture in America, and also very importantly as the main *international* center of influence within the field of Deaf education, and all the ripple-effects that this status entails for the various Deaf cultural minorities all over the world, since a Deaf person's educational upbringing plays a large socio-cultural role. The situation with Gallaudet is also intensified and complicated in that Gallaudet has fostered the development and evolution of American Sign Language, which plays a critically important role in that Deaf people are, by nature, visual beings, and here the analogy to HBCU's breaks down.

As for Dr. Hurwitz having no prior political encumbrances within Gallaudet politics, the only substantial internal wrangling occurring at Gallaudet, politically, is mostly not over substantive issues of how Deaf children should be raised or how Deaf university students should be educated, but the wrangling that exists mostly centers on the question of how this preexisting consensus on substantive matters can best be communicated and portrayed to the majority, and in particular how hearing parents of deaf children can be engaged and persuaded to take more constructive action in their children's education at an earlier phase in their child's life.

Deaf children will inevitably gravitate toward signing and the Deaf community regardless of their hearing parents' conceptions or misconceptions. This being the case, the crucial political issue is finding ways to enlighten hearing parents on the issues so that they can avoid the pitfalls that have historically been associated with the narrow and

exaggerated claims which originate within the medical industry, i.e., claims and "treatments" which generally tend to serve entrenched business interests and the financial interests of a particular professional class (audiologists, speech pathologists, etc.)