

The Gallaudet Protest Continues

Protesters at Gallaudet University in Washington, DC, the world's only university for the deaf, are continuing in their efforts to convince Gallaudet's Board of Trustees to rescind the contract of the newly selected university president, who is scheduled to assume office in January of 2007.

Washington, DC ([PRWEB](#)) May 27, 2006 -- Political brinkmanship between the protesters and the administration of Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. has reached new heights with the protesters publicly announcing efforts to canvas information in legal theory, as it pertains to the legal status of Gallaudet and the power of its Board of Trustees, and also as it pertains to prospective action that might be taken on the part of the protesters.

Protesters hope to force a change in membership of the Gallaudet Board of Trustees and to have the contract of the newly appointed President-Elect of Gallaudet University rescinded, by the Board of Trustees itself or by calling on the Federal Government to intervene, through either the Executive (US Dept. of Education), Legislative or Judicial branches.

Jane K. Fernandes was selected by Gallaudet's Board on May 1, 2006 to become the new university president, effective January of 2007. Students, members of the Gallaudet faculty and staff, and also members from the ranks of the alumni were greatly disheartened at the choice. When Ryan Commerson, a well known deaf activist and alumnus of Gallaudet, was arrested for attempting to make an announcement of his own in front of the assembly, those in attendance reacted with a sense of outrage. They filed out of the auditorium and flocked to the front of the campus where the protest then began.

Many students blocked the front entrance to the Gallaudet campus by sleeping overnight in the middle of the front campus street in their sleeping bags. The next day tents were pitched on the front lawn of the university and "Tent City," the protesters' main center of activity, was born.

Those protesting the recent selection of Jane K. Fernandes to be the next president of Gallaudet University say that current Gallaudet University President I. King Jordan exerted undue influence in maneuvering behind the scenes to have Fernandes selected by Gallaudet's Board of Trustees, possibly in an effort to cover up a long-term pattern of mismanagement of the university's finances. (See the archived press release on the gallyprotest.org Web site relating to Bernard Holt's allegations.)

Protesters point out that relevant facts about Jane Fernandes's background were either not taken into consideration by the hiring committee of Gallaudet's Board of Trustees, or ignored by the committee, including:

- 1) Fernandes's acceptance of tenure as a professor at Gallaudet without having submitted herself to a normal tenure review process and a vote of her peers (as verified by the Gallaudet Faculty Senate in their recent no-confidence vote in Fernandes),
- 2) Fernandes's acceptance of her autocratic installation as the Provost of Gallaudet University by President I. King Jordan, who simply appointed her to the position without submitting her candidacy to a normal hiring process (as acknowledged by Jordan in his speech at the National Press Club on May 9, 2006.)



3) The fact that Fernandes was the Gallaudet administrator in charge of the high school on the Gallaudet campus when a student had committed a series of petty thefts. The student, Joseph Mesa, Jr., was not expelled from the residential high school. He graduated, was allowed to enroll in Gallaudet University and later murdered two classmates over a period of four months in his Gallaudet dormitory. He is now serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole.

Protesters point out that during President-Elect Jane Fernandes's tenure as provost at Gallaudet over the past six years, academic standards have significantly declined (as verified by the Executive Branch's OMB department, in their annual "PART" assessment reports), and professors have been pressured to give passing grades to students who were doing failing work in their classes.

Fernandes has engaged herself in a public relations campaign and claims that there are those in the deaf community who think she is "not deaf enough." Protesters decry such a misrepresentation and point out that the current university president, I. King Jordan, did not become deaf until he was 21, as the result of a motorcycle accident.

When Jordan became the first deaf president of Gallaudet in 1988, he was welcomed by the deaf community with open arms, in spite of the fact that he possessed only weak to moderate skills in the use of American Sign Language. For the next 18 years, the deaf community lauded him as a hero (until recently, because of Jordan's role in the selection of Jane Fernandes and because of his opposition to the protest.)

Protesters say that Fernandes's "not deaf enough" rhetoric is a ruse and a distraction, calculated to appeal to members of the unsuspecting public. She would truly be accepted, they say, if she was competent for the job. She is not, however, they say, and they respond to her rhetoric by saying that not only is she incompetent and aloof, but she exhibits a severe lack of political savvy. She often repeats phrases slowly, word for word, and often shows an inability to make effective moves and decisions on her own without PR handlers and others supporting her from behind the scenes.

As one deaf leader conveyed in a recent goodwill message delivered in American Sign Language and posted on the Internet: "The protest is about obtaining better leadership and developing a better vision for the future, as well as finding ways to improve all the processes involved in the presidential selection process--and so many other things."

The goodwill message continues: "We protesters are succeeding! And we're doing it by chipping away at the problem and scoring little victories, dislodging one brick at a time off of the wall that's in our way... The world stands firmly in your support and is ready to support you through the summer and the fall, as we look to the future and stand united for the best for Gallaudet."

For questions about this press release, please contact Gallaudet alumnus Brian Riley by calling (559) 285-5268 or by e-mailing him via the Web site listed below.

Please visit www.gallyprotest.org for more information.

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Contact Information

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