



Board of Regents Committee on intercollegiate athletics meeting February 3, 2022

Kenneth Wong <ken@kenwonglaw.com>

Wed, Feb 2, 2022 at 11:59 PM

To: "bor.testimony@hawaii.edu" <bor.testimony@hawaii.edu>

To whom it may concern,

I am submitting my testimony in connection with item G listed on the agenda of the Board of Regents committee on intercollegiate athletics dealing with the selection and hiring process for head coaches.

Aloha, Ken Wong

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February 2, 2022

Via email
Board of Regents, Committee on Intercollegiate Athletics
Attn: Regent Acoba, Chair

**RE: University of Hawaii Board of Regents meeting 2/3/22
Item G hiring of head coaches**

Dear Chair Acoba:

I am submitting this testimony in connection with the above Item G on your agenda.

On January 18, 2022, several days before athletic director David Matlin interviewed June Jones for the UH football coaching job, I sent an E mail to President David Lassner warning him that Mr. Matlin was not objective and was biased against Coach Jones. I also pointed out that the football program did not belong to David Matlin but belonged to the people of the State of Hawaii because for most people in Hawaii, UH football is their main connection to the University of Hawaii.

I am enclosing a copy of my email to President Lassner and his response.

Because of Mr. Matlin's bias and because of the importance of the UH football program to the people of the State of Hawaii, I encouraged President Lassner to place the decision making in hiring the next UH football coach in the hands of the Board of Regents and the President and to take it solely out of the hands of Mr. Matlin.

President Lassner did not pay attention to my warnings about Mr. Matlin's bias which came into full display ^{during} with his negotiating in bad faith with the ridiculous contract offer to Coach Jones and later engaging in character assassination of Coach Jones.

I believe the President and the Board of Regents did not pay enough attention to this disaster in the making. The Board of Regents oversight over the athletic director would have resulted in better corporate governance and would have probably prevented this disgusting series of events by Mr. Matlin, for which the President and Board of Regents are ultimately responsible. Mr Matlin has given the University two big black eyes.

I can tell you that all of the football fans I have talked to are totally disgusted with the way Mr. Matlin conducted himself during the hiring process and a number have cancelled their football season tickets, or terminated their membership in Na Koa or eliminated their financial support for the athletics program.

When a prior athletic director, Herman Frazier, failed to offer Coach Jones a contract extension during the Sugar Bowl year causing Coach Jones to leave for SMU, Mr. Frazier was immediately fired. When the Stevie Wonder fiasco was uncovered, then AD Jim Donovan was fired.

Mr. Matlin failed to offer Coach Jones a contract in 2015 even though Coach Jones agreed to coach for free during his first year knowing that the University athletic program was in dire financial shape. Mr. Matlin hired Todd Graham in 2020 without performing a sufficient background check, resulting in serious charges of abuse by the football student athletes against Coach Graham, a record number of football players transferring out of the program and placing the entire football program on life support. Shortly thereafter, Mr. Matlin then engaged in bad faith negotiations with Coach Jones in 2022 and engaged in false public character assassination of Coach Jones. Mr. Matlin's conduct was more like an MMA fighter than an executive of a respected institution of higher education.


There does not seem to be any accountability or discipline faced by Mr. Matlin for his past conduct and this latest outrageous conduct during his negotiations with Coach Jones, even though I believe the results of his acts and omissions are much worse than what got Mr. Frazier and Mr. Donovan fired. Mr. Matlin would probably have been removed if he was working at any other University.

The public has very little confidence in Mr. Matlin. Although your hearing is not focused on the removal of Mr. Matlin, confidence in the office of the athletic department will not be restored unless he is removed.

One person, with all of his/her biases should not have sole power to interview, offer and select the UH football coach. The UH football program is the economic engine that fuels the overall athletic program and if the public loses confidence in the football program because of the athletic director, as is the current case, the entire UH athletic program, the entire University and indeed the entire State of Hawaii suffers. The misuse of that sole power during the Coach Jones hiring fiasco is the reason why the head coach hiring process is an agenda item during your Board meeting.

For the above reasons, I believe there should be a greater oversight over the athletic director in the hiring of the UH football coach and the athletic director should be held accountable for serious mistakes made during the hiring process. I believe this would set a standard of good corporate governance.

Sincerely,



Kenneth K. P. Wong

Enclosure

Kenneth Wong

From: David Lassner <david@hawaii.edu>
Sent: Wednesday, January 19, 2022 5:20 AM
To: Kenneth Wong
Cc: Amy Luke
Subject: Re: UH football/Dvid Matlin/June Jones

Importance: High

Mahalo Mr. Wong. I appreciate the input and your passion for UH athletics.
Best regards,
David Lassner

On Jan 18, 2022, at 5:23 PM, Kenneth Wong <ken@kenwonglaw.com> wrote:

President Lassner and Amy,

I spoke to Amy today about the pressing issue concerning the next UH football coach. Thank you for giving me your time to speak to you.

I have held football and basketball season tickets for a long time but gave up my football tickets when I saw the direction of the program and became discouraged. I am extremely concerned about the selection process for the next UH football coach and the person heading that process, David Matlin.

In my talks with donors, former UH athletes and longtime fans, many of whom know Mr. Matlin personally, there is an overwhelming lack of confidence that Mr. Matlin will make the right choice of the next football coach. He got the football program in this mess with the hiring of Todd Graham and there is great trepidation about whom he will select next, given the list of publicly disclosed candidates.

The UH football program is on life support. The last time it was on life support was after coach Fred Von Appen Appen went 0-18. June Jones was hired and he immediately resurrected the football program with the greatest turn around in NCAA history. The NCAA had given the SMU football program the "death penalty" and shut down that program two years. SMU could not recover for 25 years until June Jones arrived and resuscitated that program.

Of the 4 leading publicly listed football candidates, only June Jones has been a head coach and only June Jones has resuscitated programs that

have been on life support. June Jones knows Hawaii and its culture and will inspire great confidence in the players, with the fans and the entire State of Hawaii. Young coaches, seek to use UH as a stepping stone to obtain a greater payday at another institution. That is not a concern with June Jones because he has already made his money; hiring him would bring stability instead of the revolving door of young coaches looking for greater financial security at other programs.

There are three older coaches, all of whom are or will be in the college Hall of Fame, that have built successful programs at their school and retired or left, and were brought back to resuscitate a once proud program. These coaches are Chris Ault at Nevada, Bill Snyder at Kansas State and Mack Brown at North Carolina and they all restored a winning tradition to the program on their second go around. Therefore, there is ample precedent for bringing back June Jones.

The choice of June Jones is a "no brainer". There is a groundswell of support for June Jones from donors, former athletes, fans, media and the public. However, we understand that Mr. Matlin has a built-in bias against Mr. Jones that clouds his judgment and is "tuning out" any donors, advisors, supporters and fans who are suggesting that he hire June Jones as the next coach.

The UH football program is the part of the University system with which the public is most familiar and has the closest connection. A successful football program brings pride to the University and pride to the State of Hawaii. It does not belong to the athletic director; it belongs to the people of the State of Hawaii.

Given the current state of the UH football program, the decision on the next football coach cannot be left to David Matlin to make. His last selection was a disaster of epic proportions. At most schools, the athletic director is let go after making such a serious mistake. Athletic director Jim Donovan was let go after the Stevie Wondergate debacle. This debacle with Todd Graham, allegations of abuse of student athletes and the failure of Matlin to thoroughly do a background check on Graham before hiring him is much more serious than Wondergate.

Time is of the essence as we understand that Mr Matlin may select the next football coach by tomorrow. We implore President Lassner and the Board of Regents to get involved, come to a consensus on selecting the next football coach and not just sit back and leave it up to one person. To many, the answer is obvious: June Jones.

Thank you for considering this appeal.

Aloha, Ken Wong

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