

# Time for VVC board to take control

February 2, 2014

Dr. PAT CALDWELL

I started my career at Victor Valley College, and then spent 20 years as an employee in the California Community College system at five different colleges (instructor, counselor, department chair, dean, vice president, assistant superintendent and superintendent/president). In addition, I spent another 20 years consulting with community colleges.

I believe I have some insight into the inner workings of these colleges. Since the inception of unions in our state's community colleges, they have become very political. In colleges where there have been weak boards of trustees and/or weak administrations, the unions have become very powerful — in some colleges, all powerful. They have gotten board members elected through their endorsements, their money and their campaign efforts.

These board members often vote to support the positions of the unions, no matter the cost to students or meeting community needs.

When there are weak administrators, whose members are usually involved in collective bargaining negotiations with the unions, those administrators agree to costly and inappropriate “give-aways” that weak boards then “rubber stamp.”

This describes what has happened at Victor Valley College over the last 20 years. It is past time for that to change. The problem is there are still some weak members on the board who are not willing to take the reins and assert the authority that the legislature has given them.

The most important job a board of trustees has is to hire and/or fire the superintendent/president. The president is the board's only employee. All others report, either directly or through the chain of command, to the college president. That is specifically why Victor Valley College has a board policy (BP 7120) and an accompanying administrative procedure (AP 7120) that explain hiring procedures to be followed for the hiring of all employees except the superintendent/president. These documents clearly state that the process for hiring the superintendent/ president is solely up to the trustees.

Employees at VVC have argued that because of “shared governance” they have a right to a seat at the table — actually many seats, not just a few — and that the board should choose to use the same committee process as is used for hiring other employees.

Although some board members advocated against having a committee do their work for them, and cited the existing board policy and administrative procedure (Joe Brady comes to mind), the board has decided to have a 19-member committee with the number of employees outnumbering the community representatives, and with no board members. While not required, most community colleges in the state do use committees, but I know of none that have used a 19-member committee. As an experienced facilitator, I know first hand that getting 19 people to come to consensus is like herding cats.

But what troubles me most is not the number of committee members but that there is a committee at all. In this process, any candidates that sound like they might not support union positions get screened out before the board even gets to meet them.

I have advocated for years that the board should do its own preliminary screening, initial interviewing, and selecting of finalists. The next step should be open forums on campus where the employees and members of the community can hear presentations from the finalists, have an opportunity to ask questions of them, and then provide their input to the board on cards that are collected at the end of the forums. The board reviews this input, takes it into consideration, and then chooses the new college president (or decides against all the finalists and starts over, if necessary). I have seen this process work

well at other colleges. Unfortunately, it looks like we have a VVC board not willing to take the responsibility for the most important job that is expected of them.

Interim Superintendent/President Peter Allan's smoke and mirrors has been to claim potential "violation of Title 5," but he has yet to articulate any potential violation. Board members need to grill him for proof of such potential code violations. And, they should consult their attorney for an opinion of Mr. Allan's warning.

I have been stopped by many people who know of my background and experience asking me if what is happening is "right." They say things like "no wonder there are problems at the college." Some have said "is the board kidding?" and "that committee is ridiculous," or "is the board stupid?"

I know I speak for many others when I say that we in the community are very tired of 20 years worth of weak board members who will not stand up and assert their authority, whether it be to challenge union contracts that are presented, or to assert their right to determine their own process for hiring the president. How much longer can this go on?

Unfortunately, if the current board allows this hiring process to continue, it looks like the situation will continue. Please, board members, hear my plea: Dissolve this committee and take control of this hiring process. Show the accreditation commission that you are united, working together for the good of the students and community, and looking to hire the very best president possible. Your community will be grateful.

Dr. Pat Caldwell is a retired community college administrator. She lives in Victorville.