

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Facing Backlash, U.V.I. President David Hall Responds To Allegations Of Stonewalling Media To Hide Contract

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ST. THOMAS -- The University of the Virgin Islands late Friday issued a press release with a statement from the institution's president, Dr. David Hall, in which Dr. Hall defends his reputation and that of U.V.I.'s Board of Trustees against accusations from The Virgin Islands Daily News, contending that in the Paper's quest to receive financial records of the university's employees, the Paper had defamed his character and that of the board, the latter of which Dr. Hall described as among the best board in the U.S.

Preceding Dr. Hall's statement was a press release from Senator Almando Liburd, chiding the president for withholding what Mr. Liburd said was public information, and contending that because of the controversy that grew around the matter, a wrong

message was being sent to the community, whose money U.V.I. uses to run a great portion of its operations.

"We are sending the message that we are a territory of no laws," Mr. Liburd said. "It doesn't build confidence in our community the way we are handling our affairs—especially when it is not our money."

He added: "We have no reason to withhold information when it is in the public's interest and when we are utilizing the people's money. I can understand if this was a fully private institution but that is not the case here.

"We want to make wrong right and that shouldn't be," he said. "There is always some issue with hiding information from the public and I can understand why the people are losing faith in government.

"We have laws for a reason. We will all be better off when we collectively decide to start doing the right thing."

Find Attorney Claude Walker's opinion on the matter, [here](#). In it, Mr. Walker cited Virgin Islands Code that described the university as an "instrumentality of the Government of the United States Virgin Islands," making it subject to the territory's Open Records and Sunshine Acts.

The Consortium has requested documents revealing Dr. David Hall's contract with U.V.I., his salary, and the salaries and names of U.V.I.'s staff and faculty on both the St. Croix and St. Thomas campuses, which the university said will be provided to this publication on Monday because the office that has the documents had already closed by the time The Consortium made its request.

The Daily News received those documents today, including Dr. Hall's contract with U.V.I., according to Tamika Thomas Williams, U.V.I.'s acting director of communications.

Below, Dr. Hall's full statement:

"The actions of the University of the Virgin Islands' Board of Trustees and the Administration have been the focus of numerous Virgin Islands Daily News (Daily News) stories and an editorial for quite a few days. I share this response to these articles and allegations made therein in order to correct the numerous inaccuracies and to provide the public with a balanced representation of the facts.

"The Board and the University have at all times operated in a transparent manner and consistent with the laws of the Territory, and the Board has performed its duties with the utmost integrity, sincerity, and thoughtfulness. The salary information of all UVI employees is provided to the Governor, Legislature, and the Office of Management and Budget each year. Salary information by positions has always been provided to the Daily News whenever they have requested it, though they have chosen not to print this information.

"With all due respect to Attorney General Claude Walker, UVI's legal counsel has consistently provided an analysis of Virgin Islands law that indicates that the Open Records Act does not apply to the University. Title 17 of the Virgin Islands Code ,

captioned "University of the Virgin Islands", Section 453(b) thereof makes applicable to the University all laws that are specifically applicable to it and those which are generally applicable to independent instrumentalities of the Government. Because the Open Records Act is not expressly applicable to UVI or generally applicable to independent instrumentalities, UVI counsel have expressed the opinion that it is not applicable to UVI. As an example of the contrary, the Sunshine Act expressly applies to UVI. This is not UVI standing on "semantics;" it is a reasonable interpretation of these statutes, which have not been directly rebutted by the Attorney General.

"As an institution of higher education, we have an obligation to point out inconsistencies and contradictions in the law, even if others disagree. Yet, despite standing on this reasonable legal foundation, the Board agreed to release the salary information, with names, in order to dispel any suspicion about the Board's motive.

"In regards to my contract, neither the University, the Board of Trustees, nor I have refused to release this information. The terms of my contracts were provided to the Daily News in a letter dated January 14, 2014, issued by then Board Chairman Alexander Moorhead, and were subsequently published in the Daily News. The actual contract is part of my personnel file and therefore its release would be restricted under the Open Records Act even if it were applicable to UVI. There is an exception in the Act to the provision of records to the public where the documents contain "Personal information in confidential personnel records." Therefore, we wanted to secure legal counsel's input before a decision was made.

"After discussions with legal counsel and the Board's leadership, I agreed to release the actual contract. The fact that the contract was not handed over to the Daily News when one of its representatives showed up unannounced at Mrs. Lake-King's office, does not mean that the University is not engaging in transparency or not being concerned about the public's right to know. Some of the statements attributed to Mrs. Lake-King are inaccurate and does an injustice to her commitment to this community and her professionalism.

"In a recent editorial, the Daily News indicated that I was the "unrepentant battlefield general leading the trustees into this dishonorable disregard for the law, all for the purpose of hiding his contract and hiding the true salaries of all the UVI employees." This statement is not only baseless - without any evidence to support the assertion, it also defames the independence and integrity of the Board of Trustees. As President, I am subordinate to the Board on matters of UVI policy; the Board does not take orders from me!

"This Board of community leaders, lawyers, educators, faculty, student and alumni, are outstanding individuals who I am honored to serve. Though I am permitted to attend and vote at Board meetings, these individuals make sound independent judgments based on their own analysis and deliberation.

"The Sunshine Law, which governs meetings of public institutions, permits boards to discuss certain matters and to receive legal advice in executive sessions. Instead of respecting this legal right, the Daily News chose to portray the Board in the most negative light stating that the decision to discuss its policy relative to public access to documents and information in executive session was illegal.

"I am proud to be President of the University of the Virgin Islands because of the outstanding faculty and staff who work here, and the creative and committed students we educate each year. What they, and our alumni accomplish each year is amazing. There are still many areas in which we need to improve, but this community has a gem that is shining nationally in so many areas.

"I am also honored to work with one of the most dedicated and outstanding Board of Trustees in higher education. I speak to university presidents around the nation, and I can say unequivocally that UVI's Board constantly embraces and meets the highest standards of the profession. The Territory should be proud of the combined efforts of this dedicated team of professionals who give unselfishly of their time and resources to further the vision of this transformative and progressive University.

"As I've said before, UVI is a special place; a destination University where lives are transformed, talents groomed, and where diamonds in the rough become shining gems of success. We remain committed and focused on our mission of providing excellent teaching, innovative research and responsive community service."

Feature Image: Dr. David Hall shakes the hands of Juanita Gardine Elementary School students arriving at the university on May 2015 (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, VIC).