

Chair Peterson's Remarks – Thursday, December 7, 2023

Over the past several days, members of the YSU family have asked questions and expressed concerns about the presidential search.

People want to know why the board chose to conduct a confidential search, and how the campus community was involved. They have pointed out that our approach this time was different from how presidential searches have been conducted in the past.

I want you to know what we did, why we did it, and how we did it.

The board chose to conduct a confidential search - which simply means that the names of the candidates are kept confidential during and after the search process.

We did this at the urging of our search consultant, WittKieffer, one of the leading search firms serving universities and the nonprofit world. WittKieffer told us that confidential searches have become the best-practices approach in higher education.

The reason is simple. Many candidates, especially those who serve in highly visible senior leadership roles, simply will not consider applying if their name is going to be made public. The risk is too great.

We wanted the best possible pool of candidates so we accepted WittKieffer's recommendation. Many other universities have done the same, including Ohio State, Kent State and Akron.

Now let me explain the ways in which the campus community was involved. We began by surveying all students and employees, and we received some 600 responses, which we drew upon to develop a statement of the qualities and skills that the university wanted in its next president.

We also formed a committee of 20 people from the university community, including students, staff, faculty and trustees. This group interviewed the finalists and provided feedback, and we took their views into consideration when making the selection of our next president.

These dedicated members of the YSU family put considerable effort into this important work, and I want to thank them for their valuable contributions.

At the end of the day, it is the board's duty and responsibility to select the university's president. We made that decision carefully and thoughtfully.

Our number one priority was to ensure that we find a strong leader to continue to build upon the successes of President Emeritus Tressel.

As we went through the process of carefully reviewing each applicant, one person emerged as the clear front runner: Bill Johnson.

Search committee members pointed to his love for the university and his deep, strong ties to the region. They liked his energy and his ability to motivate people, and they see him as a visionary who can get things done, traits that he shares with Jim Tressel. They admired his success in business and in public service, including his 26 years in the armed forces, and they appreciated that both his son and his nephew are students here.

I have spent a lot of time with president-elect Johnson in the last few weeks, and it is very clear to me that he is excited to work with every YSU stakeholder – students, faculty, staff, alumni, donors and community partners.

I know that not every member of the YSU family agrees with his political views, and i want to remind us that president-elect Johnson has stated publicly that his history in politics will not be reflected in the decisions that he makes for Youngstown state university or its students. He is committed to fostering an inclusive and respectful environment at the university and wants everyone to feel welcome at YSU, regardless of their politics, religion, or identity.

Bill is committed to being president for 100% of the university's stakeholders, and he will hear every voice and lead us forward together in creating the Youngstown state university of the future.

Let me be clear. The board has made its choice. Bill Johnson is YSU's next president. He will take office no later than march 15. We are working to establish a start date, and we will inform you as soon as that is set.

In the meantime, bill intends to visit campus as often as his congressional schedule allows. He wants to meet students, faculty and staff, and to hear their views and answer their questions. He's already begun that process with campus meetings.

I encourage you to take the time to get to know him, and I hope that you will come to share my view that bill Johnson is the right choice for this university at this time in its history.

I want to thank everyone who has taken the time to share their views with the board. We've heard from people who agree with us, and those who do not. It is okay for us to disagree. What's important is that we all continue to work together to provide a great education for our students. Thank you.