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President Mahony, Provost Boyd Issue Statements on Tillman Hall Vandalism

Winthrop University

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President Mahony, Provost Boyd Issue Statements on Tillman Hall Vandalism



President Dan Mahony

ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA – Winthrop University President Dan Mahony and Provost and Former Acting President Debra Boyd made the following statements today during a scheduled Board of Trustees meeting regarding the Aug. 24 vandalism of Tillman Hall.

Below are the entire statements:

From President Mahony:



Provost Debra Boyd

This morning we encountered an act of vandalism at Tillman Hall. My thanks go out to our Facilities staff for acting so quickly to remove the graffiti.

To be clear, I do not believe we should allow anyone to force an action that would exclude our campus from the conversation.

Since last fall, Debra Boyd has been leading our exploration of Tillman Hall and our campus generally. She invited a group of faculty, staff, students and administrators to join together in a safe and confidential environment in order to begin the discussion. Soon after I was named the new President, I was proud to learn that Winthrop had been working to be out ahead of how best to recognize the highs – and lows – in our history. That effort gained more attention in the wake of the horrific tragedy in Charleston.

This working group recognized that limiting the discussion to Tillman Hall would not allow a broader reflection on Winthrop University's progress as an institution and would miss an opportunity to educate the campus community on the complex issues surrounding race and difference. They came to a consensus around a statement that will serve as a starting point for a broader discussion. Their recommendation was that as we move forward, all key stakeholders will participate in an open, collaborative process that will be thoughtful and deliberate. I thank Debra and the working group for their leadership in this effort.

I believe Winthrop is uniquely positioned to lead in this broader conversation. We are already a university that is diverse and we have a record of successfully embracing diversity in a way that has had a very positive impact on our entire campus community. Last October Winthrop celebrated the 50th anniversary of our first enrolled African-American students. This change happened without much of the rancor and hostility that occurred elsewhere.

I am confident that we can continue to address all of these issues in an inclusive and collaborative process that embraces the voices of all of our stakeholders. As has been the case in the past, I

believe we will continue to be at our best as an institution when we work together.

From Provost and Former Acting President Debra Boyd:

Our campus community stands at a defining moment. We have a responsibility to recognize that moment and our duty to embrace it. We must not forget the past but use it as we summon our collective memories and experiences to arrive at the solid ground of common purpose.

We are brought together by Tillman Hall, originally called the Main Building as it was the first built on campus, and renamed in 1962 after another building bearing Tillman’s name was torn down.

Tillman Hall was named for Benjamin “Pitchfork” Tillman, a man who as governor and U.S. Senator advocated for poor farmers against large corporate interests and endeavored to improve their condition by establishing institutions that would become Clemson University and Winthrop University. Tillman was also an unabashed racist who counted among his proudest moments his participation in the “Hamburg Massacre” of 1876 in which seven black militiamen were murdered. And one of Tillman’s most enduring and fateful legacies was South Carolina’s 1895 constitution, which disenfranchised most of the black majority and ensured white rule for generations.

Winthrop was built and grew in the shadow of discrimination and segregation, but we have worked to move into the sunlight. Last October, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of integration at Winthrop, a bright moment for our university. While certainly not without tension, Winthrop took its historic step toward integration without the vitriol and violence experienced at other campuses. Since then, we have grown to be among the most diverse public institutions of its type – both in the state and across the nation.

Considering how far we have come, how could we keep the name of so divisive an individual on a Winthrop building, no less than the main administration building which serves as the heart of our beloved institution? Certainly some believe strongly we cannot keep the Tillman name, including alumni who brought this issue to the forefront. We applaud them for moving us to this historic moment.

Others counsel retaining the name to recall the victory of the first African Americans to attend Winthrop as students, realizing an achievement Tillman himself would never have countenanced. Dr. Cynthia Roddey – one of Winthrop’s first four African-American students in 1964 – recalls with great pride defiantly climbing the steps of the building named for someone who would have denied her the privilege of an education.

Still others note that state law prohibits changing the name of Tillman Hall without approval by the state legislature by a supermajority vote, an outcome even the most ardent supporters of renaming recognize is not likely.

Our strength as a campus community is our capacity to appreciate the array of voices speaking on this matter.

We resolve to continue these discussions, but do more than talk; our goal is to identify and act on campus initiatives that are achievable, will have long term impact, and will reflect Winthrop’s culture of diversity and tolerance.

And we resolve to be known as the university community that took command of a dark chapter in our past and denied it the power to divide us. Indeed, we will be bound closer together today and in the future.

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