

Joseph M. Spivey, IV

November 30, 2023

Mr. Thomas Watjen, President
Virginia Military Institute
Board of Visitors
P.O. Box 932
Lexington, VA 24450

Re: November 30, 2023 Board of Visitors meeting

Dear Mr. Watjen,

I had the opportunity to watch today's meeting up through the motion and shift into closed session. Similar to the Board members absence of comment, I do not have any comments regarding the Superintendent's strategic plan updated slides. On the transgender issue however, I note Mr. O'Leary is insistent conversations related to the creation or amendment to policies on transgender cadets be held in closed session. He should state to the Board why this is required. Thus far discussions about transgender cadets are in the hypothetical. Without an actual person to converse about, counsel's comments should be presented in open session. I concur with Mr. Gottwald's comments regarding the transgender issue. The administration has not performed its due diligence researching, examining, understanding, and drafting policies or guidelines sufficient to safeguard transgender individuals, the Corps of Cadets, and the Institute about this matter.

I do have comments regarding the brief and the limited discussion on VMI athletics. First, the presentation lacks foresight, context, and an examination of realistic alternatives for VMI's NCAA athletic programs. Worse, it fails to present a comprehensive set of strategies or alternatives to address current and projected fiscal shortfalls.

I characterize the brief as activity masquerading as accomplishment. In short, it lacks vision. Specifically, it considers only VMI-internally controlled factors as those available to remedy the athletic department's budget issues. The brief's lack of vision is announced in the opening statements from the Superintendent. College and university athletic departments are always "making do with what they (sic) have." Obviously. Though Power 5 conference universities' athletic departments' budgets are larger than Division 2 or 3 university budgets, every university athletic department makes do with the resources it has.

The brief fails to provide examples for how or where VMI's Division 1 athletic program delivers "value to the Institute." This aspect of the brief should be explored and examples should be provided. The superintendent's statement and another person's comment (AD Miller?) regarding the number of athletes at VMI and other Southern Conference (SoCon) colleges being similar is misplaced. Though it is true the number of athletes among colleges may be numerically similar based on the number of teams a college fields, the amount of resources generated from 'athletic fees' can be significantly different. Within the SoCon, the 10,000+ student body universities (UTC, UNC-G, WCU) have significantly more resources than the sub-3,000 student body colleges (Wofford, Furman, VMI).

Additionally, while addressing athletic department operating budgets among SoCon universities why is the \$5M shortfall statistic the only metric presented? What is the breakdown between men's teams and women's teams for this figure? What is VMI's athletic department operating budget position relative to VMI's other conference affiliations, the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference and the America East Conference? Similarly, what is VMI's athletic department operating budget relative to the Old Dominion Athletic Conference, the Atlantic Sun Conference, or the Big South Conference where similar-sized colleges have athletic programs? VMI has previously been a member of two of these conferences.

1600 Harborough Road, Henrico, Virginia 23238

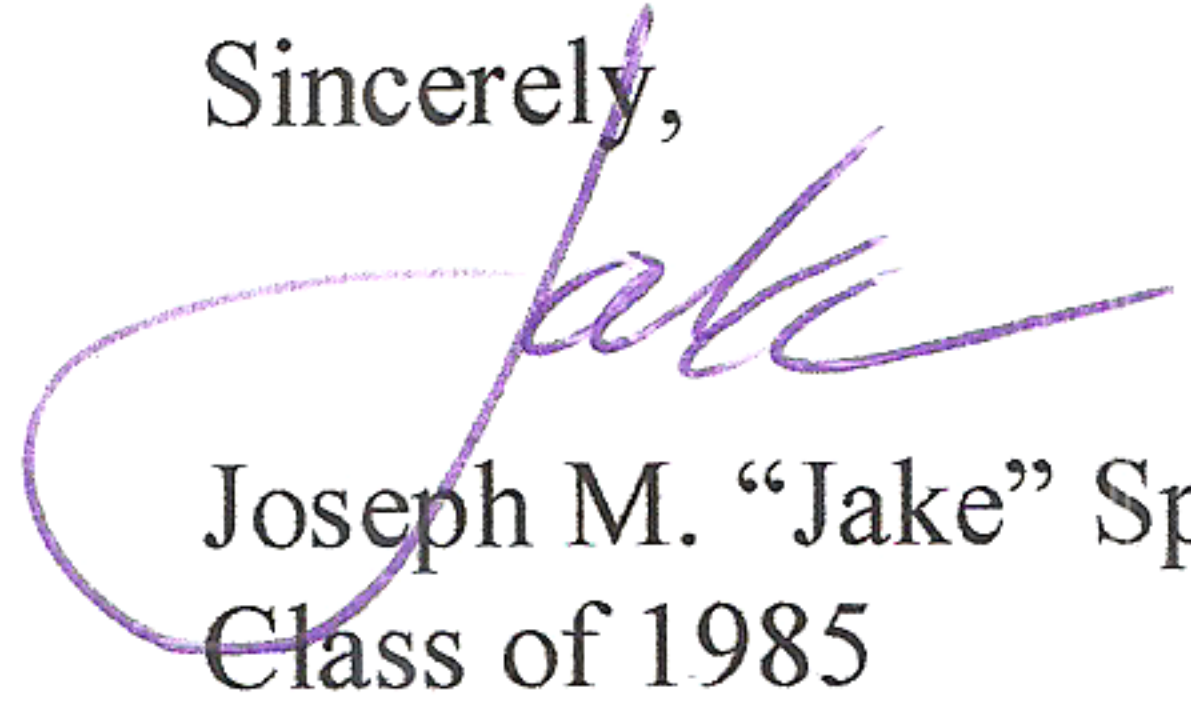
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The seven-year conference performance slide presents a pyramidal graphic reflecting eighteen accomplishments over a seven-year timeframe. VMI fields 18 men's and women's teams. Shouldn't the pyramid's numbers be: 7 top-third finishes, 17 middle-third finishes and 112 bottom-third finishes, not 1, 7, and 10? Further, the text below the pyramid states "There is a direct relationship between the degree of competitiveness and the funding of an intercollegiate athletic program." Neither this statement nor the overall brief provide evidence to support this statement. As a counter, Texas A&M posted an athletic department operating budget of \$193M in 2022. But it's affiliation with the Southeastern Conference (SEC) a decade ago has yet to enable it to participate in the College Football Playoff or even appear in the SEC championship game two objectives it surely aspires to.

In closing, the last two slides of the brief project an attitude of, failure to seek assistance, or look outside the box. For example, the brief lacks information about what and how other state-supported colleges operate their athletic departments. It lacks information about how similar-sized colleges, in Virginia and nationally and most likely Division 3 colleges, operate their athletic departments. A summary or description about the considerations Old Dominion University faced when it re-established its football program isn't presented. Information about the issues and considerations James Madison University and Liberty University faced moving up from the football conference subdivision to the football bowl subdivision isn't presented. The brief does not provide information about potential changes in conference affiliation. It fails to offer information about an examination changing from division 1 to division 3 for football only (operating similar to Georgetown Univ. or Johns Hopkins Univ.). There are additional shortcomings. Investigation into and information about these subjects might have provided additional alternatives to present to the Board.

These issues and others should be explored by the members of the Board's Athletics Committee. Their investigations should be briefed to the entire Board for action. The current situation cannot continue in perpetuity nor should the limited number of strategies (7) offered in the brief be viewed as the only realistic options for correcting the problem. Serious consideration should be given to contracting with an experienced, independent third-party organization (hence my reference to JMU and Liberty Univ. above) to conduct a thorough review of VMI's current athletics department condition and an exploration into reasonable and affordable alternatives.

Sincerely,



Joseph M. "Jake" Spivey, IV
Class of 1985

CC:

Mr. Damon Williams, Chair, Board of Visitors Athletics Committee
Mr. Thomas E. Gottwald, Board of Visitors Athletics Committee
Rear Adm. (Ret) Terrence E. McKnight, Board of Visitors Athletics Committee
Mr. Lester Johnson, Jr., Board of Visitors Athletics Committee
Ms. Nancy W. Phillips, Board of Visitors Athletics Committee
MG (Ret.) Cedric T. Wins, Superintendent
Mr. Jim Miller, Athletic Director