

Kiss President Staben Good-bye

Chris Carlson/Carlson Chronicle

University of Idaho President Chuck Staben is living on borrowed time. His days are numbered and the reason is simple: He just doesn't get the fact that in today's environment of winners and losers, the key to the perception that a university is exceptional and successful is whether it has a winning football (and to a somewhat lesser degree a winning basketball) program.

A statewide survey the University commissioned four years ago appears not to have been read by the then new and incoming president. That survey indisputably demonstrated that Idahoans all across the state rate Boise State number #1 in almost all categories measured. This position of superiority is a direct outcome of BSU's football and basketball success.

When alumni identify with a university's success they more quickly reach for their checkbooks. This becomes self-sustaining and self-fulfilling as success breeds more success. In an nano-second taxpayers in Idaho began to see BSU as more efficiently run, a safer campus with a better faculty, and a better school for delivering a post graduate job.

Staben's major sin, according to his critics, is deciding Idaho would be better off dropping down to the second tier FCS (Football Championship, the former Division I-AA) as opposed to staying at the FBS (Football Bowl---the big dogs like the PAC-12) level.

Ironically, this decision comes in a year when the Vandals have a real shot at the minimum six wins needed to qualify for an invite to a bowl.

Its not so much the decision itself, made by Staben, its how he made the decision and who he supposedly listened to before deciding. Critics say Staben made his decision in April (after allegedly promising to wait until the fall football season was over) and based it in part on a Operational Study by Collegiate Consulting not released until May 2nd.

Many of these critics are large donors who feel they were lied to and that by announcing prematurely, Staben deliberately sabotaged ticket sales and contributions to assist in making his decision a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Furthermore, Staben allegedly claimed the Big Sky Conference had given Idaho a “drop dead” date for deciding, which the Big Sky commissioner later denied.

Staben is further faulted for not listening to those with differing opinions, and for who he does listen to last. The villain in this scenario is Mike Perry who came to Idaho as part of a “package deal” that brought his spouse, the highly successful Boston College development director, Mary Kay McFadden, originally from St. Maries, back to Idaho as the new development director.

Perry supposedly was to concentrate on raising funds for the New Pavilion where future Vandal basketball teams would play. Somehow critics claim he became a key advisor to Staben and supposedly told Staben a solid majority of big donors supported the move to the Big Sky.

This is absolutely not true critics say and claim Staben can cite few large donors other than former interim Idaho president Gary Michael (the former chief executive of Albertson’s) and former Vandal football coach Keith Gilbertson, who now resides in Coeur d’Alene.

There are other issues Staben has displayed a tin ear about. Critics point to the much higher salaries Staben is providing for his new hires, and charge this has come at the expense of increasing tuition which in turn has led to declining enrollment. They further point out Idaho no longer participates in the “good neighbor” tuition reduction program that used to be in place for applicants from any state touching Idaho’s borders.

Staben also apparently received some poor legal advice telling him that it was illegal to offer a tuition reduction incentive program for alumni to send their children to the university.

There are also some legal issues with critics saying the Idaho Board of Education is vulnerable to a lawsuit for not fulfilling its fiduciary responsibilities to provide for the best interests of the University of

Idaho. Idaho's constitution declares the Board to be also the board of directors for the University.

Vandal advocates now see the board totally in the thrall of BSU partisans and point out there is no longer a board member from north Idaho.

The real bottom line here, and why Staben should dust off his resume, is the fact he has lost all credibility with a major constituency of the University of Idaho. When a chief executive of any kind of entity loses his credibility, its best for both the executive and the entity that the person pack his bags.

Hit the road, Chuck. Hit the road.