Part XIV: The List the Scandals at Cleveland Community College!! –Report and recommendations by Robert A. Williams

A reader called regarding my Part XII article that evaluated all the individual Cleveland Community College Board of Trustees. The reader believed I was a bit harsh in my evaluations. His discussion focused mostly on the fate of disgraced CCC President Steve Thornburg. It was then that I realized most of the public think and the CCC Board of Trustees has promoted that thinking that the whole issue is about College President Dr. Steve Thornburg and once Thornburg is gone, the problem is solved. NOOOOO Way!!!. Thornburg is just the tip of the iceberg. So, In the midst of the long and intentional delays by the gridlocked Cleveland Community College Board of Trustees, We are going to name the individual scandals at Cleveland Community College presently before the Board of Trustees in this one article. We will try to include other scandals that I have not disclosed yet in another article.

So, let's list and review the issues, who bears responsibility, define the scandal and what must be done.

The Issues:

1. The appearance of an unseemly, unethical and inappropriate relationship between CCC President Steve Thornburg and Senior Vice President Shannon Kennedy. Observations by many who could not help but notice Thornburg and Kennedy sitting together in a parked car in the CCC parking lot for exceptionally long

periods of time. Thornburg has the major share of blame here as he is the senior and top official at CCC. He should have known better. So should Kennedy. To my knowledge Kennedy did not protest, file a complaint or make sure she didn't get caught up in that situation again. but she was not the senior official. Thornburg must bear the major responsibility here. Strike One for Thornburg. Kennedy belongs on a watch list.

2. Another instance of an appearance of an unseemly, unethical and inappropriate relationship between President Steve Thornburg and Shannon Kennedy involves Thornburg rapidly promoting Kennedy through the ranks at CCC, allegedly over other candidates who were better qualified and had more experience that Shannon Kennedy. Even to the point of Thornburg creating the position of an Executive Vice President and then promoting Kennedy into that position. Some reports indicate Kennedy was the only candidate for that top tier position and no outside candidates were advertised for or allowed. Thornburg must bear the majority of blame for this issue as he was the senior official. Kennedy has another item on her watch list. HR personnel must also be placed on a watch list.

3. President Thornburg places the operations of CCC into the hands of his Senior Vice President Shannon Kennedy. Normally this might be acceptable if such responsibilities were delegated to Kennedy and Thornburg supervised, monitored and exercised control of those responsibilities. Thornburg allegedly just turned over those operations to Shannon Kennedy and blindly let Kennedy run the show. Thornburg has the major responsibility here, but Kennedy. in her own management position, must bear responsibility for what she has done at this point forward.

4. CCC Information Technology (IT) personnel, in the course of doing their job, discover an obscene CCC Computer System personal password created by President Thornburg which reads "fuckshannon69." Thornburg is totally responsible for his own

password creation. Further digging indicates Thornburg, when changing his password on a schedule set by CCC Policy reused this obscene password for years on end by only slightly modifying that basic password. One variation was reported to be “fuckedshannon69” which indicates an accomplishment of a sex act, if only in Thornburg’s own mind. Actions such as this indicate a total lack of judgement in a College President that cannot be tolerated by any responsible Board of Trustees. Thornburg has made a fool out of himself, the College, the CCC Board of Trustees, Donors to the college as well as the whole of Cleveland County. Thornburg has to go and go immediately. Shannon Kennedy’s items on a Board watchlist just increased to the point that her conduct and performance must also go under the Board’s microscope.

Necessary Actions on issues 1-4:
The CCC Board of Trustees must:

1. Take swift and decisive action to immediately remove President Steve Thornburg from his position at CCC.
2. An interim President must be appointed immediately.
3. That interim President must not be Shannon Kennedy
4. Kennedy’s performance and responsibility must be investigated and evaluated for possible disciplinary actions, or promotion if warranted.
5. Consider that Shannon Kennedy has no basis for a sexual harassment lawsuit as she and her career have only been benefited, although perhaps wrongly, by the actions of President Thornburg.
6. HR needs investigation regarding Kennedy’s promotions.

5. Cleveland Community College’s College level courses were “dumbed down” for those Cleveland Community College credit courses taught at various Cleveland County High Schools under the Dual Enrollment Program, now called the Career and College Promise (CCP) program. (One has to wonder about the Early College Program too.) Instructors who questioned this dumbing down of course work that is supposed to be college level were

fired or ultimately removed (Contracts not renewed, etc.). Also, high school student required grade point average requirements were often not met. High School Students enrolled in alleged dumbed-down CCP courses, as well as their parents, may later incur significant student load debt when they go to "real" colleges, are unprepared and flunk out. It has been reported that s much as 30% of CCC revenue comes from these CCP programs. President Thornburg's role here is minimized here as he has turned such operations over to Shannon Kennedy and Kennedy's various Deans and other staff who are willing or are intimidated and bullied into doing unethical stuff.

Necessary Actions on issue 5:

7. Shannon Kennedy should definitely be fired if any of these allegations are only partly true.
8. Others involved should be investigated and appropriate disciplinary actions taken.
9. Cleveland County Schools have to be a part of this conspiracy. All School Board appointed Trustees should immediately resign. A simple recusal by a board member on such a vote is not sufficient.
10. The CCS Board of Education must investigate this issue and take appropriate disciplinary action within CCS. Something they have not done. Something they have not even discussed during all these scandals. An obvious ploy by the school board to let CCC take all the heat on this scandal as well as to avoid the issue during an election year for the CCS school board.
11. The Community College Board of Trustees must require that all dual enrollment classes are discontinued immediately until further notice and for as long as it takes until Cleveland County Schools provide evidence that all students that submit applications to enroll in CCP meet all requirements. No exceptions.

6. A "chilling effect" or a "chilled work environment" was created at Cleveland Community College by high level

administration persons, Allegedly by Shannon Kennedy herself, unchecked by President Steve Thornburg or the CCC Board of Trustees. The use of the words chilling or chilled is not related to the weather. These words are used in regards "to a perception that the raising of concerns is being suppressed or discouraged – either outright with discrimination, by a slow or no response and selective firing to intimidate everyone else to "keep them in line." In a well managed organization employees and staff must feel free to raise potential issues and problems directly to their management. The most egregious part of a chilled work environment alleged at CCC is when people who voice concerns are disciplined, fired, employment contracts are not renewed, not promoted, unfairly given poor job performance evaluations, grievances are not allowed to properly proceed to the full Board of Trustees, etc. The list goes on and on and all of this seems to certainly apply to the numerous allegations and situations at CCC. As does another level of a chilled work environment; the fast and often promotion of so called "brown nosers," "stool pigeons" or "suck ups." Those who seem to enjoy the perks that encourage and support those who dish out "chill" to others. Note that poor employee morale is a very good indication of a "chilled work environment." And there is plenty of that at CCC.

Necessary Actions on issue 6:

12. Shannon Kennedy must be released immediately from CCC if these allegations are only even partly true. There can never be an effective "continuous improvement program" when problems and issues are fixed. Others who participated in the chill and cover-up thereof must be immediately disciplined or also removed from their positions at CCC.
13. Any Board of Trustee member who has gotten caught up in covering up for this should immediately resign.
14. Every instance where a person was "chilled" must be made whole. That includes re-hiring of "fired" personnel, demoting those who were improperly promoted and any other action that

is appropriate for the situation.

7. Miscellaneous allegations of Fraud, misappropriation of grant funds, deception and deceptive presentations to the CCC Board of Trustees and others for grant applications, appropriately accounting and spending grant funds etc. Some allegations state that Shannon Kennedy directly ordered some grant funding diverted to other purposes. Just bringing in an internal or external auditor is not sufficient. The School Board brought in an external auditor regarding their credit card scandal and the auditor's report indicated no serious problems. Only thing was School Board Member Kathy Falls inadvertently blurted out that the auditors were instructed to only look forward, past the reported abuse of funds, and not back at when the cards were seriously and likely fraudulently used. We suspect the CCC financial administration folks know all these tricks too. As far as the grant people go, these are mostly government bureaucrats who probably don't check the paperwork very closely either. As long as the government money going out is spent, without going over, they most likely would not notice it. For example, early in the Obama Administration millions of dollars in stimulus money was sent to dead people. Some were dead over 40 years. Then they decided it would be too costly to recover the money, so they didn't even try. Of course dead people don't cash checks or spend money. If they had just tracked down a few of those checks and charged and imprisoned those who did cash the checks, there would be less people doing such scams on the government. Same with the CCC accounting of grant money. Besides, if CCC ever did get caught. who would end up paying the money back. Taxpayers, that's who.

Necessary Actions on issue 7:

15. Shannon Kennedy must not be included in the review of these allegations as she is accused and she has the authority to shred evidence and intimidate employees.
16. The CCC Board of Trustees must initiate an external forensic

audit of all grants and where grant funds were actually spent. This forensic audit must include independent outside personnel who take anonymous “tips” from CCC employees.

17. The CCC Board of Trustees must report any fraud found to law enforcement for criminal prosecution as well as taking the appropriate disciplinary actions within CCC.

Editor’s Notes:

1. From the complexity and seriousness of these issues and scandals noted above, I believe my assessment of the CCC Board of Trustees is not overly harsh The Board as presently constituted has had most of these allegations brought to their attention about one year ago and have been in gridlock over the most simple solution to the most obvious need for action—getting rid of President Steve Thornburg—ever since. Presently there is a plan to hire an interim President by the fall semester. All this does is allow Thornburg and others to destroy evidence. We need an interim President by the end of this week, which is possible if the Board calls a special meeting and do what is right for CCC.

2. I have ended this article at this point because of it’s length. All the items noted above are totally contained within Cleveland Community College and have been initially disclosed by others. But, there are many more issues and scandals related to CCC and other agencies that I have dug up myself that need to see the light of day. I promise that information will be among the next few articles involving the scandals that embroil CCC. Keep checking back for that article.