Independent investigators appointed by the Board of Trustees at the request of Dr. Richard Holland found no evidence to support Dr. Holland’s accusations of a conspiracy to taint or skew his performance evaluation and undermine his administration.

Summary:

The investigation into Dr. Richard Holland’s allegations of a “corrupt process” involving his performance review was conducted at his request. On March 3, 2014, The University of West Alabama Board of Trustees appointed two independent investigators, attorney Drayton Pruitt and former Tuscaloosa District Attorney Tommy Smith, to investigate Holland’s allegations of a corrupt performance review process. Following the review, Dr. Holland was placed on administrative leave.

The investigators interviewed 34 people under oath, reviewed numerous documents and hired an independent forensic analyst who examined over 1.2 million emails.

During the presidential performance evaluation process in October of 2013, 43 stakeholders were interviewed, and many reports and documents were reviewed. The stakeholders interviewed included five faculty members selected by Dr. Holland. The evaluation report contained accomplishments and concerns of Dr. Holland’s administration. The evaluator testified Dr. Holland was “dismissive” of the concerns raised in the evaluation process.

Following the report, Dr. Holland issued a response prepared by Holland, David Taylor, John Key, Gary Stone, Billy McFarland and others. The response attacked the professional evaluator, who is widely recognized in his field as an expert. Holland disagreed that there were areas for improvement and alleged a “tainting of the evaluation.” Later, Holland published a “Report on a Corrupt Process Involving Certain Trustees and Administrators at the University of West Alabama.” Investigators said the report was a collaborative effort of the same group that prepared the initial response.

The “Corrupt Process” document contained at least 13 allegations of improprieties of various Trustees and Administrators, including Clemit Spruiell. On all of the allegations, investigators found “no corrupt, unethical or illegal activities on the part of the Board of Trustees.”

Instead, investigators uncovered facts related to employees involved in a conspiracy to intimidate Trustees into extending Dr. Holland’s contract. Among the facts uncovered, which included some potentially criminal acts, were the following:

- David Taylor secretly intercepted emails to spy on UWA Trustees and Administrators
- John Key misused a UWA car and obtained an improper per diem while distributing a potentially defamatory flier against Trustee nominee Hal Bloom in Montgomery
- David Taylor and John Key used UWA email accounts to further their conspiracy regarding the anti-Bloom flyer
- John Key falsely testified under oath that David Taylor did not assist in the creation of the flyer
- David Taylor falsely testified under oath that he did not assist in the creation of the flyer
Investigators found “overwhelming evidence” of a conspiracy involving Richard Holland, David Taylor, Gary Stone, Mike Holliman, Paul Hamrick, John Key and Billy McFarland to:

- Intimidate the Board of Trustees to give Holland a contract extension that would protect David Taylor
- Influence the public to support Holland
- Prepare the Response and Corrupt Process Document
- Prepare and distribute a flyer opposing Hal Bloom’s appointment
- Prepare a SACS complaint filed by Mike Holliman

Sought rewards and personal gain when Holland signed documents, either before or after he was placed on leave, to reward Taylor and Key and protect McFarland

Efforts by David Taylor and John Key to cover up evidence of the conspiracy and invasion of privacy

Investigators identified criminal statutes that may have been violated by the conspirators, including extortion, use of official position or office for personal gain, defamation, perjury, unsworn falsification, theft of property, criminal eavesdropping, criminal surveillance and criminal conspiracy.