

FSU - Lessons to Be Learned

Donald M. Petersen Jr., BS, HCD(hc), FICC(h), Publisher

On March 11, 2004, Florida Governor Jeb Bush signed Senate Bill 2002, which called for the formation of a chiropractic college at Florida State University (FSU). The Bill was approved 38-1 by the Florida Senate on March 4, and approved by the House unanimously, 113-0, the following day. The chiropractic profession in Florida was preparing for a "grand celebration."

On Jan. 27, 2005, the Board of Governors, the state agency that oversees Florida's university system, voted 10-3 to deny the formation of the chiropractic program at FSU.

Between the time Gov. Bush signed Senate Bill 2002 and the Board of Governors' decision, the tale grew worse on several fronts:

- Gov. Bush told reporters in November 2004 that SB 2002 "should be undone" and that the bill was "an issue where the Legislature did something that was inappropriate."
- In December 2004, the Florida Division of Colleges and Universities published *Chiropractic and Chiropractic Education*, a briefing paper designed to help the Board of Governors reach a decision about the chiropractic program. The report found that Florida had no shortage of practicing chiropractors, and that the existing school in Port Orange would be able to supply enough chiropractors for the state. The report essentially said that the chiropractic college at FSU wasn't needed.
- In January 2005, a group calling itself Floridians for Constitutional Integrity filed suit in a Florida court, arguing that the Board of Governors, not the legislature, has the authority to approve degree programs. The suit claimed that the chiropractic program was unconstitutional because the Board of Governors did not approve it.
- Also in January 2005, more than 500 FSU faculty members signed a petition opposing the chiropractic program, and at least nine assistant professors stated publicly that they would resign if the chiropractic school were allowed to open.

From all accounts, plans for a chiropractic college at FSU are essentially dead. So, how did we go from a "grand celebration" to absolute disaster, in just 322 days? And if we ever hope to have a chiropractic college at a major public university, what do we need to learn in order to achieve this goal?

First of all, please do not misunderstand the intention of this article. This is not an attempt to blame or criticize the valiant efforts exerted by many people in Florida over many years. The Florida Chiropractic Association; its lobbying team; former Senate Majority Leader Dennis L. Jones, DC; former House Health Care Committee Chairman Rep. Frank Farkas, DC; Sen. Durell Peaden, chair of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Health and Human Services; Rep. Bruce Kyle, chair of the House Appropriations Committee; Senate President Jim King; and many others worked very hard and should be commended for their efforts. And while they were ultimately unsuccessful, they broke new ground in many areas.

But there are lessons to be learned as well:

1. Internal Chiropractic Consensus - As is all too often the case, the chiropractic profession was not

united on the college at FSU. Fighting between organizations weakened chiropractic's position and embarrassed us more than once. If we are ever going to accomplish great things, we must find a way to agree before we set out, rather than ambush each other along the way.

2. Buy-In Required - It is obvious from following the process that the FSU faculty and many others were not in favor of the chiropractic college, and that their opinions may not have been considered. In most university settings, the faculty can prevent many things from happening. Had the FSU Graduate Policy Committee and Board of Trustees approved the program, they would not only have violated university policy; they also would have put the chiropractic program's fate before the faculty, which would likely have killed the program. Stakeholders who don't support you are almost automatically your opponents.

3. Expect Political Medicine - The chiropractic college is part of a longstanding "turf war" between chiropractic and medicine. We want in; they have tried everything they know to do to keep us out. Opposition from political medicine can always be expected.

4. Multiple Fronts - As is true in any war, the battle is on many fronts. Reviewing the events of the past four months reveals that the battles for the chiropractic college raged with medicine, the FSU faculty, the FSU administration, the legislature, various state agencies, and the public. In order to win, we have to be ready to fight on all fronts before the skirmishes break out.

5. It's Not Over 'Til It's Over - The chiropractic profession was ready for a "grand celebration" on March 11, 2004. Our opponents worked hard for almost a year in order to taste a much sweeter and final victory. We can't afford to relax even a little until the race is finished. Winning the first leg is only the beginning.

Again, it's easy to look back and say what went wrong. From here on, we need to look forward to our next opportunity to have a chiropractic college in a public university in the United States. We can win this one. We just need to learn some lessons along the way.

DMP Jr.

MARCH 2005