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CLOUT GOES TO COLLEGE

### **Quinn backs down: Governor won't fire U. of I. trustees who refused to resign**

#### **Two new trustees appointed to board**

By Jodi S. Cohen and Sara Olkon

Tribune reporters

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After threatening for weeks to fire two University of Illinois trustees who refused to resign, Gov. Pat Quinn reversed course Wednesday and said he would keep them on the troubled board.

Quinn defended his decision not to oust James Montgomery and Frances Carroll by saying he didn't want to expose the state to a protracted legal battle the two had vowed to pursue. But he faced immediate criticism for backing down, while other trustees who reluctantly resigned wondered whether they had played their cards correctly.

Shifting his focus forward, the governor named two new trustees Wednesday as he sought to get beyond a months-long investigation into admissions abuses at the state school, a crisis that Quinn called "the worst university scandal we have ever had in the state of Illinois."

Quinn appointed businessman Christopher Kennedy, son of the late Robert F. Kennedy, and former assistant U.S. Atty. Lawrence Oliver II, who served on the Illinois Reform Commission. Neither are U. of I. alumni.

The governor said he would finish reshaping the trustees board in "the next 10 days or so" before its meeting Sept. 10. Kennedy, a Democrat, and Oliver, an Independent, replace board chairman Niranjana Shah and former chairman Lawrence Eppley, who submitted their resignations before Quinn requested that the entire board step down earlier this month.

Quinn did not rule out the possibility of reappointing the five trustees who heeded his call to resign, saying he would review their records. His office has received 239 applications for the nine unpaid board spots the governor controls.

While Quinn said Montgomery and Carroll should have voluntarily stepped aside because the admissions abuses occurred on their watch, he decided not to force them out because their threatened lawsuit would have left a cloud over reform efforts.

"If we get involved in a litigation battle over the governor's removal power, that will distract from the important job at the moment and that [is] reforming everything at the university," Quinn said. "We're marching on."

Among those questioning Quinn's decision was Trustee David Dorris, who resigned last week at the governor's request even though he said he did nothing wrong.

"I trusted him. Only time will tell if that trust was placed in the hands of somebody I should have trusted," Dorris said. "It's in the best interest of the governor to reappoint me. If he doesn't, I will be very disappointed. I did the honorable thing."

Another trustee, Edward McMillan, who Quinn appointed in May, said he was "puzzled" by the governor's decision to retain the two holdouts and "a bit troubled" that Montgomery and Carroll forced his hand. Quinn on Wednesday said McMillan "very well could be appointed" to the board again.

Senate GOP leader Christine Radogno said the governor's decision does little to clean up the scandal and shows his inability to stick to his word.

"We have a situation now where some were forced to resign and others weren't. I think it almost makes the situation worse," Radogno said. "He should have researched the options, decided what he was going to do and stuck with a plan ... not just roll something out publicly and hope that it stuck."

Political scientist Kent Redfield of the University of Illinois at Springfield said the standoff between Quinn and the trustee holdouts became a distraction that could have been avoided. Demanding resignations in public without knowing that the trustees would comply "painted [Quinn] into a corner," Redfield said.

"This is a case where I'm not sure you ask the question unless you know the answer. He's put himself in a situation where he's drawn a line in the sand, and then drawn another line in the sand," he said.

Carroll, whose 6-year term expires in 2011, said she is "delighted" to remain on the board. "I welcome the opportunity to continue to work on the board to help resolve this issue of admissions and to write the admissions policy and to put some kind of sanctions in place where everybody gets a fair chance," she said. She disagreed that she was acting selfishly by not resigning. "Where I come from," she said, "you resign when you are guilty."

Montgomery did not return calls from the Tribune.

Quinn demanded the resignations after they were recommended by the Illinois Admissions Review Commission, which he appointed this summer in response to Tribune reports that hundreds of undergraduate applicants got preferential treatment because they had ties to trustees, lawmakers and other powerful people.

After eight weeks of hearings, the panel recommended resignations to allow the governor to decide who to keep. It said a reconstituted board should then decide whether the school's top officials -- President B. Joseph White and Chancellor Richard Herman -- should remain.

"They have a lot of explaining to do," Quinn said about White and Herman. "I don't want to prejudge things until the full board that I appoint has an opportunity to review [the commission's] report ... and come to a reasoned decision."

White, who gave his three campuses until Sept. 23 to address admissions problems, thanked the governor in a statement "for acting quickly to ensure continuity in the functioning of the Board of Trustees."

In a nod to the U. of I. problems, Quinn noted that Kennedy believes that everyone "should be treated in a fair way," and that Oliver "understands ethics."

Kennedy, president of Merchandise Mart Properties, had been considering until earlier this month a run for the U.S. Senate seat held by Roland Burris. He was unavailable for comment because he was in Hyannis Port, Mass., following the death of his uncle, U.S. Sen. Ted Kennedy.

Oliver, chief counsel for investigations at Boeing Co., served on a separate Quinn commission aimed at reforming state government.

"These are the beginning steps," Oliver said in an interview. "This is not a good moment in the history of the university. And these things take time to heal."

*Tribune reporters Monique Garcia and Tara Malone contributed.*

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