**The College Voice**

Wednesday, October 26th, 2005

**SPECIAL EDITION**

Mercer County Community College’s student newspaper, serving the college community since 1969

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**Trustees Terminate Rose**

Story reported and written by Marc Daubert, Michelle Treanor and Matt Wilkowski.

The Mercer County Community College board of trustees fired President Robert Rose Tuesday, after failing in almost four hours of negotiations to reach a contract buy-out agreement with Rose and his attorney.

The 9-1 vote provided Rose six months’ severance pay, or about $77,500. It sparked outrage from faculty members, who walked out of the college’s conference center en masse after directing several harsh comments at the board and its chairman, Anthony Cimino.

The firing, unprecedented in the college’s 39-year history, followed the board’s release last week of a report by Mercer County Inspector General Robert Farkas. The report alleges Rose cheated the college by improperly billing for lavish parties, as well as overseeing lax financial accounting and other possible violations.

Farkas sent the information to Mercer County prosecutors to consider criminal charges against Rose. Trustees had put the president on paid leave in June when they launched their own financial investigation, a month after Farkas began investigating.

Kevin Hart, Rose’s attorney, said Wednesday that he planned to file a lawsuit on Friday or Monday alleging that trustees wrongfully fired the president. Rose could not be reached for comment.

Hart said the board’s public release of the Farkas report on Oct. 18 violated the state’s open records law and Rose’s employee rights. He said the trustee decision “smacks of political cronism.”

Only trustee Concetta Maglione voted against the motion. She is the lone remaining trustee from the board that hired Rose in 2001, the majority of whose members were appointed by Republicans. Most of the 11 current trustees, including Cimino, have been appointed by Democrats, including six by Mercer County Executive Brian Hughes. Inspector general Farkas also works for Hughes.

Cimino said that while Rose “was a very good cheerleader for the college, he also has an additional responsibility as the CEO, which is to ensure that the college functions properly. There are a number of areas where the college was not functioning properly.”

Maglione said Rose shouldn’t have been fired “because he was so valued by faculty and staff.” She added, “I don’t know that the charges against him were totally validated” and said she believed Rose had “no intent” to do anything wrong.

“Cimino said that trustees will consider at their Nov. 17 board meeting recommendations for how the college should reorganize “operationally, financially and organizationally.” He said the board would begin to search for a permanent replacement “relatively soon.”

Speculation before the meeting was that trustees might agree to buy out the remainder of Rose’s contract, which was set to run through spring 2007. A buy-out would have avoided a lawsuit and allowed Rose to leave without being fired.

But more than three-and-a-half hours of private negotiation Tuesday night proved fruitless. At 10:22 p.m., trustees filed back into the conference center, reconvened in public session and voted to fire Rose.

After the vote, trustee Robert DiFalco said that Rose and Hart had approached the board “to work out a deal.”

Standing with Rose in the back of the auditorium, Hart yelled in response that “the board requested that we come to this meeting.” Rocky Peterson, the board’s attorney, responded that Hart had on Friday given the board a proposal to negotiate.

“I’m water over the dam. We’ll see you guys in court,” Hart said. He and Rose then shook their heads and walked out.

Leaders of the MCCC Faculty Association said they would meet Thursday to consider a vote of no-confidence in Cimino.

Faculty members had voted 75-2 last week to ask trustees to reinstate Rose. Many of the more than 100 attendees Tuesday wore yellow ribbons to show support for the president.

Association President Bob Pugh told Cimino after the vote, “One thing you’ve lost is trust. Nobody trusts you now. And you’ve lost respect, with the way you’ve bungled this investigation. You will never get that back. Your ability to run this college is just about nil.”

Pugh told Cimino that faculty and other community members would not let Mercer become a “dumping ground for politicians,” adding, “We’ve got our eye on you.”

After the meeting, Cimino said, “We will work very hard to regain the trust of the college.”

“You’ve put this man through hell for months,” Art Schwartz, an MCCC math professor, told trustees. “As you go through a search for a new president, and you find no one who matches up to Dr. Rose, I hope you do the honorable thing and resign.”

Shortly afterward, most faculty members left in a group protest.

DiFalco said that failure to investigate the allegations against Rose “would have been gross negligence on the part of the board of trustees.”

Mel Leipzig, an MCCC art professor, said that by acting politically trustees “have ruined the reputation of the Democratic party in this area.”

He called for the board to disavow itself from politics, with appointees evenly divided between Democrats, Republicans...

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— Use of MCCC
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— Questionable
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charges being filed.
— Failure to keep
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— Violation of
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Campus Reaction
“Continued from front
cans and independents.
Leaders of two other
MCCC employee unions
expressed support for the
trustees.
“We had faith in the
board all along,” said
Marie Mendez, president
of the college's Federation
of Secretarial, Clerical and
Technical Employees.
Maria Tazza, presi-
dent of the MCCC Profes-
ional Staff Federation,
said, “We would have
liked to see this end more
quickly than it did, but we
have had trust in the
board, we support MCCC,
and we hope to move on
and continue to move for-
ward.”
The allegations
against Rose in Farkas'
report include:
— Overpayment
for on- and off-campus
events, including at least
eight parties, some at
Rose's residence. Rose im-
properly took home alco-
hol after some parties.
— Use of college
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hurricane. We're in a time
of mourning, healing and
reconciliation."

Campus Reaction
“This is the saddest 24 hours of my career at MCCC.”
Arthur Schwartz, MCCC math professor
“The board did the right thing. Rose misused college funds. He was
given a second chance here, after what he had done in Massachusetts,
and he failed at that chance.”
Jacob Copland, MCCC student
“It's like a wake on campus today.”
- Bob Pugh, president, MCCC Faculty Association
“It cannot be political. If Rose didn't do anything wrong, he wouldn't
be gone.”
- Joan DeLucia, administrative specialist
“Not much has been said about Rose to the students, and most of the
information distributed about Rose was to the faculty.”
- Jennifer Tarbay, MCCC sophomore
“Rose did a lot for the school. But wherever there is mishandled money,
there are bound to be problems. I would have liked him to stay.”
- Rich Wright, campus security officer

ROSE TIMELINE
August 2001
Mercer County Community
College board of trustees hires
Dr. Robert Rose as president.
Trustees make the move
despite knowing of a Massa-
chemus auditor's report that
criticized Rose for lax financial
practices while president at
Massasoit Community College.
Spring 2003
Rose is suspended for six
months after an 18-year-old
woman alleges that he fondled
her in his office. Mercer County
prosecutors find insufficient
evidence to press criminal
charges, and Rose is reinstated.
January 2005
Brian Hughes, a Democrat, is
elected Mercer County
executive, creating an office of
inspector general to investi-
gate corruption charges.
March 2005
A state Superior Court judge
rules that five MCCC trustees
appointed by former County
Executive Robert Prunetti, a
Republican, were illegally
appointed without consent of
the county board of chosen
freeholders. With an additional
resignation, Hughes is able to
appoint six trustees on the 11-
person board, including
Chairman Anthony Cimino.
May 2005
Hughes announces that Robert
Farkas, his inspector general,
will investigate allegations of
financial misdealings at MCCC
involving Rose.
June 2005
Trustees launch their own
investigation of Rose by hiring
a forensic accountant. They
suspend Rose with pay from his
$155,000-a-year job.
Oct. 18, 2005
Citing the Farkas report,
trustees fire Rose for cause,
with six months' severance pay.
Rose's attorney vows to sue
the board for wrongful termina-
tion.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE OF THE COLLEGE VOICE
The editing staff of The Voice rushed this special issue to print to provide
the MCCC campus community with accurate and complete information
about the extraordinary events of Oct. 25, 2005. We would also like to
thank MCTV for their cooperation and assistance in covering this story.

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