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## NEGOTIATION OR FAIT ACCOMPLI? IN SEARCH OF GOVERNANCE

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*When a man says that he approves something in principal, it means he hasn't the slightest intention of putting it in practice." - Otto Von Bismarck*

The palpable sense reigns all over Hall Memorial Building (HMB) crawling with students, staff, alumni and faculty members this Sunday morning before dawn. The morale is low, the hope clings on. The FSSA's relentless determination to carry the negotiation with the Board of Trustees (BOT) to the next level has vanished in a flash thanks to the chair of BOT Chairwoman Brenda Jo Brueggemann's letter to Student Body Government (SBG) President Noah Beckman, echoing the administration's fait accompli. On numerous occasions the FSSA has requested to negotiate with the board to acknowledge the flawed presidential search process and come up with a plan to re-examine the entire process from outside consultants to the final board selection of the 9th president of Gallaudet.

Not once has the board voluntarily summoned the FSSA to the table to work together and come to an agreeable resolution. Not once. They came back right after the protest broke out in May upon FSSA's request to hear them out. A series of heartfelt dialogue between the board members and the elected representatives of FSSA followed the next day for ten hours. Tears rolled, honest to goodness testimonials by the FSSA members and, perhaps, if I'm not mistaken, two board members were deeply moved by the narratives. Yet, the board replied later on after that meeting that they would not reconsider their decision electing Fernandes as the 9th president, nor do anything else to alleviate the rising concerns and tension across the campus. It was back to business as usual, with a "heigh-ho" smile and wave on graduation day.

After a summer's rest, reflection, and a smatter of meetings, the members of the FSSA gave the board the benefit of doubt by offering another round of negotiation. The negotiation would have been a wise and responsible thing had the board agreed to sit and work something out to bring order and assurance on campus. However the FSSA's ultimatum on the two demands may sound like a take it or leave it offer, the board could still come to the table and work something out, as it is their prerogative to demonstrate the spirit of cooperation on Kendall Green. Instead, on that cold rainy night Mr. Beckman hand delivered another letter of negotiation

into the warm dry hands of Chairwoman Brueggemann at the Kellogg Conference Center during I.K. Jordan's retirement gala--and it went unheeded. The board's reply was one of indifference as icy cold and wet like that rainy night. This brings up the recurring suspicion that the entire process by the Jordan administration in the presidential selection process and the board's inactive participation to work with the FSSA was the fait accompli. The Bismarck quote at the top of this article clearly invoked in many minds the Board's hallowed "agreement in principle" that there is a need to address audism and racism on campus, that they will address those matters. There is a pervading sense of no indication of putting this study into practice because as it stands now, the hungry, the tired, the huddled students, staff, alumni and faculty members at HMB have been assaulted, pepper-sprayed, criticized, and condemned by the board via the Department of Public Safety. Strategic Goal 6 promises that Gallaudet University "nurtures and strengthens its position as a global education and cultural center... and demonstrates its commitment to diversity by reaching out to deaf and hard of hearing people everywhere." Reaching out? Who, the board? The administration?

Here's the crux of the problem: Who is going to be in charge of exploring those matters? The next administration to be led by the president-designate Fernandes? Granted, Fernandes's presidential platform is the university's Eight Strategic Goals. If president-designate Fernandes is at the center of the controversy, how is it ever possible for her to fairly and objectively address the lack of a cooperative spirit as an otherwise Strategic Goal 5 where "Gallaudet University promotes an environment where every member of the community is included, valued, and respected"?

It will be difficult to put into practice what the president-designate has preached to the campus community divided by strife and differing ideals thanks to the obvious hint of the fait accompli of the Jordan administration. They refuse to negotiate; the FSSA has tirelessly tried to negotiate. Fait accompli, pre-designated Fernandes. As one student remarked, had the board made a simple offer to work something out, had the board resumed to call for an independent investigation into the presidential search process, this matter would not have come to this confrontation.

I, along with the FSSA, ask every member of the Board of Trustees and the Jordan administration to prove each and every assertion wrong.