

Tallahassee Democrat

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LOMBARDI: He apologized again for calling the incoming chancellor an 'Oreo'

tivity and efficiency of his university.

Regents officially insisted that no agreement exists to have Lombardi step down. But they acknowledged that his resignation and possible financial terms were discussed during private meetings Thursday. Regent Dennis Ross of Tampa also said that Lombardi was given conditions by which he could possibly remain on the job.

A letter written by the regents general counsel, Gregg Cassano and faxed to Lombardi on Wednesday outlined terms for a possible departure. The Tallahassee Democrat requested a copy of the letter but did not receive it Friday.

For his part, Lombardi refused to answer questions about his continued stewardship of the state's largest university, which has 42,000 students.

"I have a rule. I never say what I'm going to do next," said Lombardi, whose academic field is Latin American history and politics. Herbert, who said that he and Lombardi met for 90 minutes Friday morning to discuss UF issues, also refused to say whether Lombardi would leave his post soon.

Part of the problem in this state is that people focus on incidents," Herbert said. "John Lombardi and I have agreed we are going to do all we need to do to build a stronger university and a stronger state."

Ross, who acted Thursday as a liaison between Lombardi and Herbert, said that Lombardi has to evaluate whether he can work within a system that puts university policy under the authority of a chancellor and regents. Lombardi previously has angered Reed and regents by taking proposals directly to legislators.

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— Orlando Regent James Hecklin

Ross and Regents Chairman Steve Unfelder said they learned recently that Lombardi gave tacit approval to the idea of setting up local boards of trustees — instead of regents — to control individual universities. A UF lobbyist, however, denied school officials had agreed to support such a proposal.

A similar measure was proposed in 1986, regents' anger over it prompted Lombardi to seek the presidency of Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore until Gov. Lawton Chiles, a UF alumnus, helped negotiate a truce.

Ross also said he remains concerned that Lombardi's comments about Herbert show "an attitude that he carries in terms of respect of the chancellor."

"There has to be a high degree of trust between the chancellor and a university president," said Ross. Orlando Regent James Hecklin said Lombardi's future depends on him.

"If he persists in his efforts to separate the University of Florida from the rest of the university system, he ought to look for work elsewhere," Hecklin said.

When asked if Lombardi would rank and file voters in primaries and not by the party "elite."

Nicholson urged Lambert several weeks ago to support a compromise that would strip the proposal of its funding ban, leaving just a statement opposing the procedure.

"That's not compromise, that's capitulation," Lambert said he told Nicholson.

Chuck Yob, a member of the national committee from Michigan who chaired the party's Resolutions Committee, also was lobbied by Nicholson. Yob said he supported the funding ban, but at Nicholson's urging convinced his panel to withhold its endorsement.

"I was tore up a little bit," Yob said.

Betsy DeVos of Michigan introduced the amendment that replaced the funding ban with language strongly supporting a prohibition on the partial-birth procedure.

Lambert criticized those who supported watering down the proposal, saying "a majority of the people who voted against this abandoned principle."

He predicted Republicans who support the right to abortion procedure will face hard times at the polls, pointing to last week's triumph of anti-abortion Republican Tom Bondarian in an open Congressional primary in California over Brooks Firestone, a GOP state legislator who supported abortion rights.

be on the job six months from now, Unfelder said, "It's a question of his conduct."

At Friday's regents meeting at Florida Gulf Coast University, Unfelder tried to defuse the Lombardi-Herbert situation. "I'm a great believer that people can work out their differences," he said.

But he also said, "I've never in my life had a more difficult situation to deal with ... I just someone wanted to wave a magical wand and put the genie back in the bottle."

It was apparent that the two days of attention had worn on many of the regents and Lombardi, who stared at a wall during the time he was sitting in the meeting room. Both Lombardi and Herbert also had to deal with a half-dozen TV crews, a rarity at the policy-dominated board meetings.

Although regents offered guarded comments about Lombardi's fate, the president did enjoy support from a group of about 50 UF students who traveled by bus from Gainesville to stand with their leader. Student Government Association President Chris Dorworth read a resolution to regents from the student governing group asking that Lombardi remain as president.

The students met privately with Lombardi after the regents meeting and asked him to hold a student forum next week to discuss the entire issue.

Dorworth said although that students support the president, they still want him to apologize to them.

"There's been a lot of speculation but I hope that no further action will be taken ...," said Dorworth, a 21-year-old senior who is majoring in political science. "I hope he can remain at the university and continue to give his personal touch."

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