

Wallace status frozen in time?

Thursday, May 24, 2007

It's been a year since federal prosecutors swooped down on Warren Wallace's office at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey campus in Stratford.

The occasion was rapidly followed by a damning report from a federal UMDNJ monitor and Wallace's loss of his post as a dean; less rapidly followed by the indictment of the school's former top dean and of state Sen. Wayne R. Bryant whom prosecutors charge received of a do-nothing job at UMDNJ.

And Wallace, who still sits on the Gloucester County freeholder board? No criminal charges, no substantial response from him and a state of limbo that has been disconcerting to county citizens. It must be downright wrenching for Wallace himself.

Recently, Wallace obtained new legal counsel and a fresher proclamation of his innocence. In a statement, his attorney, Rocco C. Cipparone Jr., said " ... If there is any federal or state criminal investigation into Dr. Wallace's activities regarding UMDNJ or otherwise, we are confident that a thorough investigation will reveal that there has been no criminal conduct by Dr. Wallace."

But, there's been no elaboration or explanation of the accusations, and Cipparone declined a Times request to interview Wallace.

That simply leaves a cloud of doubt over a Gloucester County freeholder that he is a good and upstanding person who deserves the public trust.

Wallace's behavior in his \$166,000 UMDNJ post, as chronicled by federal monitor Herbert Stern, may not rise to the level of criminality but the report accused Wallace of steering a no-bid contract to a friend, running interference to try to get his daughter into UMDNJ's School of Osteopathic Medicine, and falsifying expense records. And, it's pretty clear UMDNJ let Wallace go as a result of the report.

Maybe Wallace is completely blameless and has a good claim for unfair termination, but we haven't seen one. Meanwhile, he continues to serve as a freeholder, drawing a public salary from a public that doesn't know if he is trustworthy. That's unsettling.

We've regularly asked Wallace to explain his situation in light of the allegations, as he once promised to do. After a year, Wallace still isn't ready to do that.

Perhaps the onus should shift now to the other freeholders, who still have faith that Wallace has done nothing wrong. They ought to demand from Stern and/or U.S. Attorney Christopher Christie a letter stating that Wallace isn't under investigation for any illegal conduct. If they can't get one and if Wallace won't try to remove the cloud placed over him, other freeholders should demand publicly that Wallace resign from the freeholder board.