



OPINION

True to the cadets and alumni who created it, cadets have 100% editorial control of all content independent of VMI or any other influence.

VMI at a Crossroads: Why Integrity Must Trump Politics in the Institute's Future

The Virginia Military Institute has long been a bastion of honor, leadership, and tradition. Founded to mold leaders of integrity and moral courage, it now finds itself caught in a storm of political agendas, ideological skirmishes, and administrative indecision. At the heart of this maelstrom lies a singular, essential question: Is VMI still upholding its core mission, or has it become another pawn in the relentless game of political power plays?

This is not merely an internal crisis—it's a pivotal moment that could reshape the very ethos of one of America's most storied institutions.

The recent controversy surrounding the possible extension of Superintendent Maj. Gen. Cedric Wins' contract has spotlighted the dangerous intrusion of politics into VMI's governance. Instead of measured debates over leadership effectiveness and institutional integrity, backroom deals and political strong-arming seem to have taken center stage.

During the February 2025 Board of Visitors (BOV) meeting, board member Teddy Gottwald revealed a troubling claim: a state senator allegedly pressured BOV members, threatening to withhold critical funding unless they approved Wins' contract extension. Congressman Ben Cline later implicated State Senator Jennifer Carroll Foy, citing an alleged warning that VMI's budget was "in peril" unless Wins, the Institute's first Black Superintendent, was granted a four-year extension.

Foy's non-denial—stating that this wasn't a "fair summation" of her views—leaves the core allegation unaddressed. Whether the conversation was misinterpreted or intentionally veiled, the specter of political coercion now looms over what should have been a straightforward decision based on merit.

This is not how VMI was meant to be governed.

VMI's history warns against the dangers of external meddling. Its founders designed a governance structure to shield it from short-term political winds, recognizing that a military institution must operate above the fray of partisanship.

Yet here we are.

Wins' supporters cite previous closed-door BOV evaluations and a \$100,000 bonus as proof of his successful leadership, but the opaque nature of these records raises serious concerns about transparency. If such assessments are private, how did specific political figures gain access to them? And if they've been made public selectively, why hasn't the whole community seen them?

Worse, the debate has devolved into accusations of racism, political loyalty tests, and ideological grandstanding. Senator Foy's critiques of BOV President John Adams '96, devoid of clear evidence, seem less about accountability and more about scoring political points. It's a disservice to the cadets, alums, and stakeholders who deserve honest discourse about the Institute's leadership.

In moments of institutional crisis, leaders face three choices: act decisively,

See A6

The Cadet Staff

Cody Bartmann '25
Co-Editor-in-Chief

Richie O'Connell '22
Co-Editor-in-Chief

Adam Cioffi II '26
Co-Managing Editor

"Alex" Dieffenbach '26
Co-Managing Editors

VACANT
Distribution Manager

VACANT
Sports

Presley Matter '25
Social Media Manager

VACANT
Club Writer

Staff

Jackson Creach '25

William Perry '26

Mark Stann '26

Robert Morris '79
Senior Mentor

Thomas Wilson '79
Alumni Business Manager Mentor

Join the staff and let your voice be heard! email: info@cadetnewspaper.org

The Cadet is an independent student publication created by cadets and alumni independent of VMI in 1871. It transitioned to newspaper format in 1907. Articles contained in The Cadet are those of the authors and do not reflect the opinions of the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) nor any VMI Alumni Agency (VMI AA). True to the founding principle of the cadets who created it, The Cadet, as a truly independent cadet controlled and edited publication, neither VMI nor VMI AA provides support to publishing The Cadet or has any editorial control over its contents. The Cadet is owned and published by cadets through The Cadet Foundation, an IRS approved 501c3 non-profit corporation run by a Board of Directors consisting of cadets and alumni for the specific purpose of ensuring funds received support The Cadet and activities benefitting VMI cadets. Funding for the operation and The Cadet comes from donations and sponsored spaces. All articles and images in this publication are the intellectual property of The Cadet except as specifically noted and are not for further use, reproduction or distribution without the expressed, written consent of The Cadet Foundation. For information contact: info@cadetnewspaper.org. The sentinel box image is a registered Copyright of The Cadet 2021. Contents of articles are Copyright The Cadet, 2022.

Hartsock nominated for the Board of Visitors!

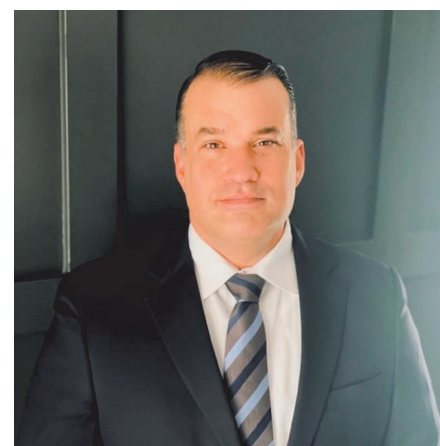
- By The Cadet Staff

HEEEZZ BACK!

On Feb. 26, Gov. Youngkin nominated the Corps' own Lt. Col. (Ret.) Jonathan Hartsock '00, to fill one of the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) Board of Visitors (BOV) seats vacated during the recent General Assembly kerfuffle!

Welcome back COLONEL Hartsock! and "Help us O-be-One Hartsock! You're the only one!"

Sir... CAN THE CADET GET ITS MOU AND PERMIT NOW?



VMI's own Col. Hartsock '00

- Photo by Legalstorm

DARTS



DART - To Keydet Basketball for their 40-point loss, too bad the Corps was forced there to watch.

DART - To COL Faust for upholding the Blue Book in a way that inhibits my ability to go off post.

DART - To the Saturday formal inspection, you won't find my illegal items. I bet my freedom on it and am taking a day anyway.

DART - To the entirety of the Commandant's Staff, there is definitely a sinister air around you all.

DART - To the Physical Plant for building a wall on the Smith Hall side of the Parade Deck.

DART - To Washington and Lee students for being a bunch of Minks, your daddy's money will run out when I insurance fraud you.

DART - To the administration for briefing the BOV that you are assuming they will give you YET ANOTHER tuition increase next year to offset your spending spree.

DART - To the Government, please pay our ROTC stipends.

DART - To the dating pool at Southern Virginia University. It was only one date, please stop asking me if I want to marry you.

DART - To every single Charlie Co. recorder. You aren't cute, and you aren't funny. I hope every Crozet plate you grab during the lunch rush is dirty.

LAURELS

LAUREL - To Lt. Gen. (soon to be GENERAL!) Dan "Razin" Caine '90 for being returned to active duty, promoted to 4-star and nominated to be the new Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff - bring the warfighter and VMI ethos back!

LAUREL - To our supporters who are submitting FOIAs and sending us the results at no charge so the administration can't starve us for money to get information that should be available for free.

LAUREL - To the RCO for releasing the Corps from March down, we shall not compare you to Mark Shelton in the privacy of our rooms ever again.

LAUREL - To the class of 1990 for having a Commandant and a Chairman. Obviously, the Commandant is FAR more important (COL Havird if you are reading this please for the love of EVERYTHING grant us an extended weekend PLEASE).

LAUREL - To the person who decided on the MidWinter glasses, they're prime for drinking the hooch I am hiding in the mouthwash bottle in my barracks room.

LAUREL - To the DOGE for saving Americans tens of dollars.

LAUREL - To our dear COL Bogart, I apologize for how we treated you. I didn't realize how much worse privileges could get. Let a lowly cadet double up?

LAUREL - To the newly crowned class of '28 for getting into a drunken barracks room brawl soon after breakout. Keeping the VMI spirit alive and well, I see.

LAUREL - To the Rat Disciplinary Committee, we at The Cadet hope you had a fantastic time at Saturday's midwinter with your dates!

LAUREL - To the VMI Onion account on Instagram (@thevmionion) for providing comedic relief to the Corps with your content. I love showing it to elderly alumni and convincing them the headlines are legitimate.



Congressman Ben Cline Calls For Ethics Investigation into Virginia Lawmakers' Threats Against VMI Board

- Letter from Congressman Ben Cline

Per a Feb. 20, 2025 Press Release from his Office provided to *The Cadet*, Congressman Ben Cline is calling for an immediate ethics investigation into reports that members of the Virginia General Assembly engaged in political coercion. Cline charges they are “attempting to strong-arm members of the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) Board by threatening to withhold funding if they do not extend the contract of VMI’s superintendent.” Congressman Cline sent a letter to the Clerks of the Virginia House and Senate calling for the inquiry. “The idea that members of the General Assembly would use their positions of power to intimidate VMI Board members by conditioning funding on the extension of the superintendent’s contract is not just inappropriate, it is an outright abuse of power,” said Congressman Cline. The full text of the letter, as provided by his office to *The Cadet* follows and is available for download in *The Cadet* online at www.cadet-newspaper.com:

Congress of the United States House of Representatives
Ben Cline, 6th District, Virginia
2443 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515
(202) 225-5431

www.cline.house.gov
 February 18, 2025

Hon. G. Paul Nardo, Clerk of the House

Hon. Susan Clarke Schaar, Clerk of the Senate

Virginia State Capitol
 1000 Bank Street
 Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Mr. Nardo and Mrs. Schaar,

I write to you today to share reports I received regarding conduct of a member of the General Assembly related to the Virginia Military Institute and the employment contract of its Superintendent. The reports I received are deeply troubling and, if accurate, each body of the General Assembly should impanel their respective Standards of Conduct subcommittees to further review these actions.

As Congressman for Virginia’s Sixth



Congressman Ben Cline (R-VA)

Photo by Rocktown

Congressional District, I am proud to represent the Virginia Military Institute. This storied institution produces outstanding young men and women prepared to serve our nation in many capacities, and it is the responsibility of all those who serve Virginia to support and strengthen it. The Institute is also a significant economic driver in this region, and many of my constituents earn their livelihoods from the Institute.

Within the last few weeks, members of the General Assembly have attempted to pressure the Board of Visitors to extend the employment contract of VMI’s superintendent, General Cedric Wins. These members have suggested they would take official acts as legislators if the General did not receive a lengthy contract extension. These actions, specifically the direct threats made by Senator Jennifer Carroll-Foy, are unbecoming, inappropriate, and ethically questionable.

Senator Carroll-Foy recently spoke to a Board member claiming that certain members of the leadership of the General Assembly had “placed in peril” funding for VMI, and that it could only be rectified if General Wins received a four-year contract extension. According to the Board Member, Senator Carroll-Foy said the following:

“I am just trying to help VMI. Cedric is African American. The leadership of the

See A6

Sen. Jennifer Carroll Foy's response to Congressman Cline: VMI Board of Visitors rejecting a Black Superintendent

- X Thread by Virginia State Senator Jennifer Carroll Foy

In response to Congressman Ben Cline’s letter to the Virginia House and Senate Clerks calling for a formal investigation into her alleged threats against Virginia Military Institute (VMI) Board of Visitors members in order to secure a new contract for VMI Superintendent Maj. Gen. Cedric Wins, Virginia State Senator Jennifer Carroll Foy '03 posted an untitled thread to her X account on February 23, 2025.

Senator Foy’s full X post follows:
Given the misinformation & barrage of attacks by Thomas Gottwald (VMI '83), Spirit of VMI PAC, MAGA Republican Ben Cline, John Adams (VMI '96) & others, during this Black History Month, in the spirit of Shirley Chisholm of being “unbought and unbossed,” I want to be clear.

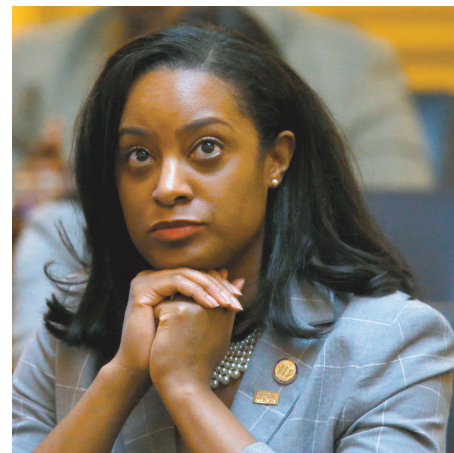
VMI Board of Visitors President, McGuire Woods partner and Republican John Adams called me repeatedly and informed me that the VMI Board of Visitors no longer wants a Black Superintendent.

The majority of VMI Board of Visitors has been appointed by MAGA Republican Governor Glenn Youngkin. The Gottwalds have donated over \$500,000 to Youngkin directly or through the Spirit of VMI PAC which Thomas Gottwald is the top donor.

“The [Spirit of VMI] SoVP has counseled and advised Governor Youngkin on EACH and EVERY member that he has appointed to The BOV. We now have a majority of the BOV Members (13 of 17) as Youngkin appointees.” - Source- the Sentinel Newsletter – July 16, 2024

“Members of the Spirit of VMI, a political action committee comprising alumni, parents and friends of the school, have argued that DEI is ‘unnecessary,’ promotes racial division and urge others to ‘reject the woke assault on VMI.’”

Members of the VMI Board and the Spirit of VMI, forget that General Wins was recruited to lead the Institute



Virginia State Senator Jennifer Carroll Foy '03

- Photo by Bob Brown/Richmond Times-Dispatch/AP

through a tumultuous time - Source, *The Washington Post*

I reminded Republican Adams that history-making and well-decorated Superintendent General Wins has served this country and VMI with distinction.

In fact, VMI recently awarded Superintendent Wins with a \$100,000 bonus for his performance. In addition, Superintendent Wins has either met or exceeded his overall Management by Objectives that were set, reviewed & approved by the BOV every year since 2021. They also approved his strategic plan for the Institute.

Lastly, there was never any tangible feedback that he failed to effectively lead VMI in the right direction or was leading the Institute down the wrong path.

The anti-DEI rhetoric is for the expression of fear about the “browning” of this country, for the disdain for the inroads that Black people are making despite the barriers that were placed before them, for the feelings that Black leaders are always inferior so they do not belong in positions of power so they must be removed.

Everyone should be highly concerned by MAGA Republicans’ attacks on military Generals who have exceptionally

See A6

Fact-Checking the Superintendent's Contract Fight

- By The Cadet Staff

The question of whether or not the VMI Board of Visitors (BOV) should give the Superintendent a new contract and if so, for how long, erupted over the past few weeks into racial, political, and ideological disputes that did more to obscure the subject than clarify or resolve it. Using statements and publications by the key players involved as well as publicly available documents, *The Cadet* attempts to inform its readers by fact-checking the various sides of the dispute.

In the Feb. 8, 2025 BOV meeting Mr. Thomas E. “Teddy” Gottwald '83 raised the issue that “a certain state senator has been calling VMI board members basically saying if we don't take certain actions, they're going to withhold our funds.”

In his Feb. 18, 2025 letter to the Clerks of the Virginia House and Senate demanding an ethics investigation, Congressman Ben Cline (R-VA-06), without identifying the source, named Virginia State Senator Jennifer Carroll Foy '03 as one of the callers. According to Cline’s letter: “Senator Carroll-Foy recently spoke to a Board member claiming that

certain members of the leadership of the General Assembly had ‘placed in peril’ funding for VMI, and that it could only be rectified if General Wins received a four year contract extension.”

Foy countered in a Richmond Times-Dispatch article that same day. “Not once did he [Cline] call me to verify the things that he is saying” stated Foy. In that same article, Foy did not deny she made the statement Cline attributed to her. When the reporter asked directly if she did make it, Foy responded, “I would not say that this is a fair summation of my feelings about the issue right now.”

On Feb. 22, 2025, Foy posted a thread on her X social media account calling for the Superintendent to receive a new contract, claiming: “...Superintendent Wins has either met or exceeded his overall Management by Objectives that were set, reviewed & approved by the BOV every year since 2021. They also approved his strategic plan for the Institute.” She also cites the \$100,000 bonus the BOV awarded the Superintendent. *The Cadet* could not verify the performance evaluations she cites as they are private in nature and exemption from disclosure under the FOIA. The BOV conducts any



Congressman Cline (left), Maj. Gen. Wins (Center), State Senator Foy (Right)

- Cline Photo by Rocktown, Wins by VMI Alumni Agencies, Foy by Bob Brown

discussion of such personnel matters in closed session according to its By-Laws, “The Board shall annually deliver, in **closed session**, its evaluation of the Superintendent's performance.” [emphasis added]. Foy did not provide either these records or how she obtained such sensitive personal information, so *The Cadet* was unable to determine the truthfulness of her claim one way or the other. *The Cadet* was able to determine that the BOV that approved the bonus Foy cites was under the control of then Governor Ralph Northam '81. She did not provide any substantiation of the claim in the Times-

Dispatch interview, “... members of the General Assembly have nothing but high regard for General Wins and the work that he is doing at the institute,” The Senate did pass Senate Resolution 223ER on January 30, 2025 commending the Superintendent for his “legacy of service” and as an expression of its “...admiration for his contributions to the country and the Commonwealth and best wishes for his future endeavors.” Foy was the Chief Patron and fellow Democratic Senator Creigh Deeds co-sponsored. According to

See A7

VMI at a Crossroads: Why Integrity Must Trump Politics in the Institute's Future

From A2

act poorly, or refuse to act at all. The last is often the most damning.

The BOV now faces precisely this dilemma. By failing to address Wins' future directly during regular sessions, the board risks passively allowing his contract to auto-renew without formal deliberation—a bureaucratic sidestep that screams cowardice more than governance.

If the board believes Wins has strengthened VMI, vote to extend his contract. If they think otherwise, end it. But doing nothing is the worst possible outcome. It suggests a leadership body more concerned with avoiding backlash than fulfilling its core duty: safeguarding VMI's mission.

As the late philosopher Albert Camus once argued, "The lack of making a decision is a decision." The BOV's inaction would not be neutral—it would be com-

plicit in the slow erosion of the Institute's autonomy.

Lost in all of this are the cadets themselves.

While political figures squabble over ideological control and administrators dodge accountability, cadets endure crumbling infrastructure, leaking plumbing, black mold, and unreliable Wi-Fi in their barracks. They're forced to attend NCAA games as "military duty," even during exams, yet can't buy a beer at the stadium. Meanwhile, millions are funneled into administrative buildings and leadership centers, leaving core student needs unmet.

VMI was built to forge leaders—not to turn its cadets into pawns in an endless ideological war. Every dollar spent on political vanity projects is not spent on the cadets' well-being, education, or development.

It's time for the BOV, state leaders, and VMI's administration to embody the

values they so often extol: integrity, transparency, and accountability.

Hold a Special BOV Session — BOV President John Adams '96 must convene an open session to debate and vote on Superintendent Wins' future. The public deserves to see how each board member stands on this critical issue.

Demand a Full Investigation — Allegations of political coercion cannot go unanswered. Whether through the Virginia Attorney General or an independent federal agency, a neutral investigation is necessary to restore faith in VMI's governance.

Center Cadet Welfare—VMI's leadership should prioritize cadets' tangible needs—improving infrastructure, academic resources, and campus life—over ideological battles.

Demand Transparency—All records related to the Superintendent's evaluations, BOV deliberations, and political communications should be made public.

Sunlight is the best disinfectant.

VMI's founding principles demand leaders with moral courage—leaders who stand up not for political agendas but for the institution's long-term mission. Today's question is whether VMI's current leadership has the backbone to meet that standard.

The public, alums, and cadets deserve better than political posturing and bureaucratic inertia. They deserve leaders who will make hard decisions, even when those decisions come at a personal or political cost.

The stakes aren't just about one Superintendent's contract. They're about VMI's identity, integrity, and future as a national institution. If its leaders falter now, the damage will ripple far beyond Lexington.

History will judge whether the BOV acted with integrity or cowered under political pressure.

Let's hope they choose courage.

Congressman Ben Cline Calls For Ethics Investigation into Virginia Lawmakers' Threats Against VMI Board

From A3

General Assembly is African American. Your board appointments and budget amendments are in peril. You can fix this by giving Cedric a four-year contract extension."

These race-related comments, wholly unbecoming of a member of the General

Assembly and completely inconsistent with the values of our nation, make plain that the leadership of the General Assembly is attempting to exert undue influence on the decisions of the Board in exchange for funding priorities of VMI.

Contract decisions are the prerogative of the Board of Visitors for each institution, as set out by the Constitution and

state law. Attempting to coerce Board members under the threat of taking official acts on state funding is inappropriate and ethically questionable, at best. In my sixteen years of service in the General Assembly, I never witnessed any legislator threaten to take official acts if a Board of Visitors did not accede to their demands related to the contract of a uni-

versity president.

I respectfully request you forward this letter to the appropriate panels of the House and Senate for additional review.

Sincerely,

Ben Cline

Member of Congress

Sen. Jennifer Carroll Foy response to Congressman Cline: VMI Board of Visitors rejecting a Black Superintendent

From A3

served this country.

Despite what is happening on the federal level, I will always defend our military members from unjust attacks.

In Virginia, we know that our diversity is our strength. Fanning the flames of racism and racial tension is not who we are as Virginians and has no place on our boards.

For context, Senator Foy's thread contains a document entitled Statement from Outgoing Board President Tim Watjen '76 Regarding the Board of Visitors (BOV) appointments wherein she highlights two sentences in support of her argument Virginia Military Institute (VMI) BOV members John Adams,

Teddy Gottwald, and unnamed "others" are working to prevent VMI Superintendent Maj. Gen. Wins from obtaining a new contract on racial grounds. The first highlighted section of Mr. Watjen's letter is, "I am disappointed in how politicized the board appointment process has become, impacting board experience and continuity." The second is "I also believe the politicization of the process energized others to use VMI to promote personal and/or political agendas which are distractions from the job at hand." While Senator Foy's full and unedited post is printed here, it is important to clarify a point on the Watjen letter she posted with it.

As *The Cadet's* previous publication of Mr. Watjen's actual letter shows, within hours of initially posting the one Senator

Foy used in her thread to the VMI website Mr. Watjen retracted it in full and replaced it with a substantially different letter that remains posted to the VMI website as of this publication. Mr. Watjen's actual public statement removed all the language Senator Foy highlighted and is substantially different in most aspects. While his first letter sharply criticized the new BOV members and the Governor's selection process, his actual letter focused on defending Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) at VMI, Maj. Gen. Wins, and advanced Mr. Watjen's position that "... for the good of the Institute and our cadets, we cannot afford to backtrack on the progress we have made in this area." Neither version of Mr. Watjen's letters contains language that anyone did not want a Black Superintendent. To fully

inform our readers given Senator Foy's statement the reason for her X post was, "Given the misinformation & barrage of attacks by Thomas Gottwald (VMI '83), Spirit of VMI PAC, MAGA Republican Ben Cline, John Adams (VMI '96) & others, during this Black History Month, in the spirit of Shirley Chisholm of being 'unbought and unbossed,' I want to be clear." So readers can form their own opinion based on the facts of Mr. Watjen's actual letter *The Cadet* is making this difference known and both letters are posted to the online version of this article on the VMI website at www.cadetnewspaper.org and set outside the paywall for free public access.

Locally-owned and serving the Lexington, Buena Vista and Rockbridge County community since 1801.

E-subscriptions available at TheNews-Gazette.com.



The News-Gazette

TheNews-Gazette.com

Fact-Checking the Superintendent's Contract Fight

From A3

her Facebook Page Foy presented this to Maj. Gen. Wins and the contingent of VMI Cadets who visited the Capitol on Feb. 7 just before the controversy broke with Mr. Gottwald's comments in the BOV meeting.

Former Governor Doug Wilder, the nation's first Black governor and Delegate Don Scott, democratic Speaker of the Virginia House, joined Foy in pushing for the Superintendent to receive a new four year contract citing the lack of any evidence of his failures. In the Feb. 22 thread Foy posted to her X social media account, she stated, "... there was never any tangible feedback that he failed to effectively lead VMI in the right direction or was leading the Institute down the wrong path." Wilder stated in an interview with the Richmond Times-Dispatch, "There must be a reason for that [not offering Wins a new contract]. To my knowledge, none has been stated."

While *The Cadet* could not locate BOV documents one way or another on the Superintendent's performance, public records, including video of Senate Sessions, show the events when the Democratic-controlled Virginia Senate Privileges and Elections Committee removed Youngkin BOV nominees Quinton Elliott '85 and Clifford Foster '93 from the BOV. During those sessions Republican Senators offered a spirited defense of Elliott and Foster, that included the Superintendent's laudable praise for their appointments and qualifications. When asked during the session for a reason why Elliott was not qualified to be confirmed for the BOV, Foy, speaking for the Democratic majority, stated, "the Privilege and Election Committee found the appointee [Elliott] is inconsistent with the goals and values of the [VMI] Board." She refused to take any further questions. Scott, however, in his Times-Dispatch interview stated "It's not about General Wins' contract — it's about whether the school is moving in the right direction."

Scott asserted in his Times-Dispatch interview that his comments were not intended to pressure the BOV on the Superintendent's contract, "I do not want to interfere with how the board hires and fires and oversees their fiduciary responsibility... It's very much so the board's decision", but added "...that doesn't mean the decision doesn't have consequences." As noted by Maj. Gen. Wins in the Feb. 6 BOV Executive Committee meeting Del. Scott's first visit to VMI was Jan 25, one day after the Senate Committee removed Elliott and Foster, two days before the House took up and supported the removals, and approximately a week before Mr. Gottwald reported the alleged threats to the BOV.

In her Feb. 22 X thread, Foy charged, "VMI Board of Visitors President, McGuireWoods partner and Republican

John Adams called me repeatedly and informed me that the VMI Board of Visitors no longer wants a Black Superintendent." Foy's thread does not provide proof she verified the statement she attributed to BOV President John Adams '96 with him. *The Cadet* could not locate any statements Adams made on the issue and he is not commenting on the situation. The thread further cites "...the misinformation and barrage of attacks by Thomas Gottwald (VMI '83)..." but does not include any documented examples. The only statement *The Cadet* could locate through a variety of internet and posted BOV documents searches is Mr. Gottwald's statement during the Feb 8. BOV meeting that, "a certain state senator has been calling VMI board members basically saying if we don't take certain actions, they're going to withhold our funds." Mr. Gottwald did not name the Senator, unless Congressman Cline's letter and Senator Foy's statement are meant to confirm she is that State Senator.

Foy's thread continued with charges that Governor Youngkin appointed the majority of current BOV members and the Spirit of VMI Political Action Committee (Spirit of VMI PAC) advised the Governor on all his BOV appointments" These statements are accurate. Under Virginia Code the Governor has the sole authority to appoint BOV members and the majority of BOV appointees have eventually all been named by the Governor in power. It is part of the Governor's job.

Anyone, including members of the public, and those who want to serve on Boards themselves can submit nominations through the Secretary of the Commonwealth website and advise the Governor on BOV nominations. One criticism of the VMI Alumni Association by a number of its members is that its internal nominating committee, without input or approval from the alumni body *writ large*, develops a list of BOV nominees coordinated with the Superintendent who carries them to the Governor.

Foy's thread also claimed "The Gottwalds have donated over \$500,000 to Youngkin directly or through the Spirit of VMI PAC which Thomas Gottwald is the top donor." Public records do show that cumulatively, during the period 2021 - 2023 Teddy Gottwald is cumulatively the Spirit of VMI PAC's highest donor at \$50,000 having donated \$25,000 each of those years. According to public records for the period 2021 - 2024, Bruce Gottwald donated \$400,000 to Youngkin's Campaign and from 2021 - 2023 The Spirit of VMI PAC donated \$25,000.

Public records also show that during the same 2021 - 2024 period, Foy received \$200,000 from the Defeat Republicans Political Action Committee, \$1,080,000 from the liberal-leaning Clean Virginia Fund, and \$750,400 from S. Sonjia Smith. The billionaire couple Son-



Democratic Speaker of the House Don Scott (circled) with Maj. Gen. Wins at the VMI basketball game 25 Jan 2025 the day after the Senate Committee removed Elliott and Foster from the BOV and two days before the House took up the nominees

- Photo by The Cadet Staff

Smith and Michael Bills control the Clean Virginia Fund and Commonwealth Forward PACs, whose donations combined for a total donation to Foy, during the period, of \$1,830,400. According to its website, Clean Virginia "... works to fight corruption in Virginia politics in order to promote affordable clean energy and community control over our energy policy." McGuireWoods, the law firm Mr. Adams is a partner in, that Senator Foy called out in criticism of him, donated \$1,250 to her campaign in 2024.

For its part, the Spirit of VMI PAC responded in its own Feb 23. X social media thread containing the subjective observation, "For @JCarrollFoy to continue to now use race to divert attention from her own poor judgement is appalling and unethical." The group stated that, "Earlier this year two of Governor Youngkin's nominees to the VMI Board of Visitors, both endorsed by The Spirit of VMI, were removed by the Democrat controlled Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections for no apparent reason." These claims are substantiated by *The Cadet's* previous coverage and video of the Committee hearings themselves. The groups claims as to Mr. Elliott's qualifications are also a matter of record and there are no readily available sources to dispute the group's claim, "These same [VMI BOV] Board members are living by their bylaws by not discussing the performance of General Wins, the good and the bad, publicly."

There is no information available to *The Cadet* substantiating the Spirit of VMI PAC's claim that Senator Foy "wants to tarnish his [Maj. Gen. Wins] reputation by having his contract discussions held in open public."

The BOV does have the authority to hire, employ, or not employ the Superintendent and "...ensure that the Superin-

tendent complies with all Board and statutory directives." While discussions of the Superintendent's performance must be confidential and occur in closed session, any changes must be approved by the majority of the BOV and voted on in open, public session. Former Governor Northam, for example, effectively fired former VMI Superintendent Gen. J.H. Binford Peay III '62 simply for a "lack of confidence" in his ability to lead VMI.

VMI, the BOV, and Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85 have not made any public statements on the status of the Superintendent's employment. The next scheduled BOV meeting is this coming May, so if Mr. Adams does not convene a special session in March to take up the issue of the Superintendent's contract, it will automatically renew for another year on Apr. 2, 2025. As of this printing, a Special BOV Session was just called for Feb. 28, but the Agenda lists the topic to be discussed only as "Closed session."

The General Assembly adjourned on Feb. 22 after dropping VMI's proposed multi-million dollar Center for Leadership and Ethics (CLE) Phase II Capital Project, but left over \$1.2 million in additional VMI operational funding. Republicans claimed the cut was unwarranted and the Governor vowed to restore it, while Democrats responded that VMI was not singled out among all the overall cuts. *The Cadet* will continue to watch this developing story and report any significant updates.

Links to all the documents and videos covered in this story are available in the online version at www.cadetnewspaper.com

PAPAJOHNS®

LOCALLY OWNED & OPERATED

ANY large 1-top for \$7.99

ONLINE ONLY promocode: **RAHVAMIL**

Keep The Cadet independent



DONATE

givebutter.com/Gw0jQW

info@cadetnewspaper.org

Donations are tax deductible.



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Cadet Foundation, the Jefferson Council, and the Generals Redoubt Join the Call for an Investigation into Political Intimidation and Free Speech Repression at Virginia Military Institute

**MEDIA ADVISORY
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 20, 2025**

Contact: Bob Morris
Office: (757) 869-6770
Info@thecadettfoundation.org

Yorktown, Virginia February 21, 2025 – The Cadet Foundation (www.thecadettfoundation.org) joined by Alumni Free Speech Alliance partners the Jefferson Council for the University of Virginia (TJC) (www.jeffersoncouncil.org) and The Generals Redoubt for Washington and Lee University (TGR) (www.thegeneralsredoubt.us) are sounding the alarm on disturbing efforts by members of the Virginia House and Senate to pressure the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) Board of Visitors into granting Superintendent Maj. Gen. Cedric Wins a new four-year contract, despite serious allegations of impropriety. The Cadet Foundation, TJC and TGR are calling for an independent investigation into the unethical and potentially unlawful actions of those involved.

The Cadet Foundation, TJC and TGR are members of a larger national organization, the Alumni Free Speech Alliance (AFSA) (www.alumnifreespeechalliance.org), comprised of 27 independent alumni groups committed to “Preserving the Pursuit of Truth in American Higher Education”. Over the past several years, several of the 27 AFSA groups, including The Cadet Foundation, TJC, and TGR have repeatedly raised concerns regarding VMI leadership's suppression of free speech and intimidation of dissenting voices. These concerns were formally presented to the Secretary of Education and the VMI Board of Visitors, yet they were dismissed without meaningful action. Empowered by this inaction, the situation continues to deteriorate.

Recently, members of the Virginia Senate and House of Representatives, working in concert, attempted to strong-arm the VMI Board of Visitors into extending the contract for VMI's Superintendent, Maj. Gen. Cedric Wins, through explicit threats to withhold funding from the Institute. This coercion, reported by Congressman Ben Cline in a letter to the clerks of the Virginia House and Senate (attached), directly undermines VMI's institutional integrity and jeopardizes the well-being of cadets by tying essential funding to an administrative decision that should be made independently and in the best interest of VMI's mission.

A Pattern of Intimidation and Retaliation

The concerns surrounding Maj. Gen. Wins' leadership are not new. Under his tenure, *The Cadet*, VMI's award-winning independent student newspaper, has faced repeated attempts at censorship, as documented by warning letters or letters of concern from The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE), The Student Press Law Center (SPLC), and most recently the Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF). Despite these concerns, warnings and public outcry, VMI's administration continued to take retaliatory action against cadets culminating in an egregious memorandum issued by VMI's Chief of Staff designed to isolate cadets from external supporters.

Additionally, the Virginia Senate's recent rejection of six highly qualified gubernatorial appointees to the VMI Board of Visitors suggests a deliberate effort to maintain political control over these institutions. Among those rejected were distinguished leaders committed to transparency, governance, and the preservation of institutional integrity. The exclusion of these individuals raises serious ethical questions about favoritism and undue influence. Moreover, The VMI Administration appears to be defying the Presidential executive Order and Secretary of Defense Directives on DEI claiming they have the authority to force Cadets to attend "military duty" that includes NCAA Sporting Events, DEI training and more under Title 10 U.S.C. – Armed Forces. In light of recent discussions surrounding the extension of Maj. Gen. Cedric Wins' contract as Superintendent of the Virginia Military Institute (VMI), we unequivocally condemn the attempts by members of the House and Senate to threaten withholding funds in exchange for a new contract based solely on race. [Read VMI's Claims and the ADF Letter HERE](#)

Call for an Independent Investigation

Congressman Ben Cline is calling for an immediate ethics investigation into reports that members of the Virginia General Assembly have engaged in political coercion, and threatening to withhold funding if the Virginia Military Institute Board of Visitors does not extend the contract of VMI's superintendent (enclosure).

"The idea that members of the General Assembly would use their positions of power to intimidate VMI Board members by conditioning funding on the extension of the superintendent's contract is not just inappropriate, it is an outright abuse of power," **said Congressman Cline.**

In his letter, Congressman Cline highlighted that one VMI Board member reported that Senator Jennifer Carroll-Foy stated the following:

"I am just trying to help VMI. Cedric is African American. The leadership of the General Assembly is African American. Your board appointments and budget amendments are in peril. You can fix this by giving Cedric a four-year contract extension."

[Read Cline's Letter HERE](#)

VMI cadets themselves called attention to how this situation puts their education and VMI experience at risk but so far are being ignored except by Cline's inquiries.

[READ the Opinion Piece BY CADETS HERE](#)

The Cadet Foundation, TJC, and TGR join Congressman Cline's call for an immediate and thorough investigation into these matters by the **Virginia House and Senate Standards of Conduct Subcommittees** and **The Virginia Attorney General's Office**. If these allegations prove to be true through a fair and impartial investigation, those responsible should face the severest penalties available. As the Cadets on VMI's independent student newspaper so articulately pointed out, Cadets should not be pawns in fights over political ideology. No one should fear the truth a truly open, transparent, objective, and thorough investigation will reveal.

Defending VMI's Legacy and Its Cadets

The Cadet Foundation, TJC, and TGR stand resolutely in defense of free expression, institutional independence, and the cadets who have been subjected to an environment of fear and retaliation.

VMI is at a crossroads. The Board of Visitors must act courageously and independently in making decisions for the institution, free from political interference. Any failure to do so will undermine the very principles VMI seeks to instill in its cadets—honor, integrity, and service.

The Cadet Foundation, TJC, and TJR urge all VMI alumni, supporters, and concerned citizens to contact their legislators, demand accountability, and stand up for the principles upon which VMI was founded. The time for action is now. Further information on VMI and The Cadet Newspaper is available from The Cadet Foundation on its website at: www.thecadetfoundation.org and The Cadet newspaper at: www.cadetnewspaper.com.

Media Contact:

Robert C. Morris, Jr.
COL, USA (Ret)
The Cadet Foundation
Phone: (757) 869-6770
Email: Info@thecadetfoundation.org
Website: www.thecadetfoundation.org



Thomas M. Neale
University of Virginia Class of 1974
President Emeritus and Co-Founder
The Jefferson Council for the University of Virginia
Email: tom74@comcast.net
Website: www.jeffersoncouncil.org



Thomas P. Rideout
Co-Founder and Chairman
The Generals Redoubt
Washington & Lee University
Email: trideout@thegeneralsredoubt.us
Website: www.thegeneralsredoubt.us



THE  CADET
Foundation

February 27, 2025

**Board of Visitors
Virginia Military Institute**

We appreciate your time and consideration of this letter as part of the permanent public record. Our intent is not to disrupt your proceedings but rather to formally document concerns regarding transparency and fairness in the governance of the Virginia Military Institute (VMI).

It is deeply troubling that the broader VMI community received minimal notice of the opportunity for public comment. The last-minute posting of the notice, just before the statutory deadline, effectively limited awareness and participation. Moreover, the lack of clarity in the notice and agenda regarding the meeting's discussion topics raises concerns about procedural fairness. In contrast, certain organized groups, including activist organizations, appeared to have advanced knowledge that the meeting would address the Superintendent's contract—allowing them to coordinate submissions in support of a predetermined outcome.

If the meeting will indeed focused on the Superintendent's contract renewal and he does not receive one, these groups and others could misrepresent the absence of dissenting viewpoints as consensus, rather than a consequence of restricted access to information. Transparency is a cornerstone of ethical leadership, and the disparity in awareness and engagement suggests a process that may not be impartial or inclusive of all voices within the VMI community.

While we do not take a position on the contract renewal itself, we strongly urge the Board to address this matter with the integrity and fairness that VMI's legacy demands. Furthermore, we call for a full, independent investigation into the potential manipulation of this process by individuals or organizations, including state employees, external groups, elected officials, or even members of the Board of Visitors. Any wrongful acts, regardless of the perpetrator, must be identified and addressed to uphold the principles of accountability and good governance.

We appreciate your attention to these concerns and trust that the Board will ensure transparency, fairness, and ethical decision-making in all proceedings.

Respectfully,



Robert C. Morris, Jr.

COL, USA (Ret)

The Cadet Foundation

Phone: (757) 869-6770

Email: Info@thecadetfoundation.org

Website: www.thecadetfoundation.org



Congressman Ben Cline Calls For Ethics Investigation into Virginia Lawmakers' Threats Against VMI Board

**MEDIA ADVISORY
FOR IMMEDIATE
RELEASE
February 20, 2025**

Contact: Maggie Clemmons
Office: (202) 225-5431
maggie.clemmons@mail.house.gov

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Congressman Ben Cline is calling for an immediate ethics investigation into reports that members of the Virginia General Assembly have engaged in political coercion, attempting to strong-arm members of the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) Board by threatening to withhold funding if they do not extend the contract of VMI's superintendent. These disturbing actions reveal a clear and troubling effort to exert undue influence over VMI's governance.

"The idea that members of the General Assembly would use their positions of power to intimidate VMI Board members by conditioning funding on the extension of the superintendent's contract is not just inappropriate, it is an outright abuse of power," **said Congressman Cline.**

VMI, one of the nation's most storied military institutions, has long upheld a tradition of service, leadership, and honor. The men and women who serve on its Board of Visitors should be free to make decisions in the best interest of the school, its cadets, and its mission, without political interference from members of the General Assembly seeking to force ideological conformity.

In his letter, Congressman Cline highlighted that one VMI Board member reported that Senator Jennifer Carroll-Foy stated the following:

"I am just trying to help VMI. Cedric is African American. The leadership of the General Assembly is African American. Your board appointments and budget amendments are in peril. You can fix this by giving Cedric a four-year contract extension."

"These comments, wholly unbecoming of a member of the General Assembly and completely inconsistent with the values of our nation, make plain the leadership of the General Assembly is attempting to exert undue influence on the decisions of the Board in exchange for funding priorities of VMI," **Cline continued.**

Congressman Cline is demanding immediate accountability for those responsible and calling for an ethics investigation into this outrageous abuse of power. He will continue to stand with VMI against political intimidation and ensure that its mission remains intact, free from coercion and political interference.

Read the full letter [here](#).

###