

## READERS HAVE STRONG OPINIONS ON LEEBURN REAPPOINTMENT TO BOARD OF REGENTS

Sometimes, this column just writes itself. Or, more accurately, readers write it for me. That is the advantage of having smart, articulate and passionate readers with strong opinions. Eat your heart out, Molly Ivins. Folks all over the state have their dander up over Gov. Sonny Perdue's reappointment of Columbus liquor baron Don Leebern to the State Board of Regents.

I have heard from UGA staffers, professors, athletes, alumni and ordinary Georgians who are upset (to put it mildly) at the fact that the governor has apparently turned a blind eye to Leebern's living openly with a member of the University of Georgia athletic department, gymnastics coach Susan Yoculan, although not yet divorced from his wife. One UGA alumnus wrote and said, "I have told my children, all of whom are UGA graduates, that the answer is ... money! That can be the only reason no public outcry has been heard about Leebern's involvement with Suzanne Yoculan."

Or, as an Athens couple phrased it, "Our alma mater (has been) turned over to Leebern to run as he sees fit. It proves the new Golden Rule: 'He who has the gold makes the rules.'"

Says one retired UGA administrator, "The political and educational leaders of this state have blessed a new code of conduct and have downgraded the Ten Commandments to a piddling few." He has a point. A reader sent me the response he received from Gov. Perdue, after complaining about the reappointment. In his letter, Perdue says that he couldn't afford to let "personal issues such as this" interfere with the "main mission of the University System," whatever that is. Look for the governor to introduce legislation defending the right of county courthouses to display the Nine Commandments.

Even many Republicans are unhappy. A former high-ranking state official said, "Republicans have been waiting for the opportunity to appoint people to the Board of Regents, and if for no other reason, every existing regent should be analyzed to be sure they are someone with whom our current Republican governor has a like philosophy. However, I suspect what Leebern has to offer makes him politically acceptable to anyone, particularly someone who is going to have to run another campaign in the not-too-distant future. Frankly, as a lifelong Republican, I have found Perdue's actions and appointments disappointing."

Another Republican supporter was even more direct: "I am so upset with 'Mr. Sonny' that I have mailed back my Georgia Republican Party card for 2005, and they will not receive one cent from me (not that they will miss the small amount I annually contribute)."

Some readers question the double standard. Said one retired UGA professor, "If a mere professor of anything within the University System had been involved in these kinds of episodes, they'd have been 'offed' and rightly so." A UGA alumnus put it this way, "Can you imagine the backlash if a UGA football coach was married and living with another woman? He would be fired so fast it would make your head spin."

In fairness, there was one letter of support for Leebern from an employee of a prominent brokerage firm in Atlanta, who accused me of a "hatchet job." He chose not to respond to my offer to point out inaccuracies in the column, and I chose not to tell his supervisor that he was writing on a company computer on company time, which I would assume was time taken away from making money for the company.

My favorite response came from a minister unhappy that the powers-that-be fired the UGA cheerleader coach for holding weekly Bible classes but apparently condone the Leebern-Yoculan arrangement. While Leebern was complaining loudly that the Atlanta newspapers opposed his reappointment to the Board of Regents because he "didn't share the paper's warped liberal agenda," the reverend wasn't sold on his argument. "'Conservative' would never fit him," the reverend said of Leebern. "The word 'liberal' should be in front of his name." Ouch! Lordy, I love my readers. They tell it like it is, and they do write good columns.