

John G. Rocovich

Moss & Rocovich, P.C.
Roanoke, Virginia

May 28, 2026

The Honorable Candi Mundon King
Secretary of the Commonwealth of Virginia
Patrick Henry Building
1111 East Broad Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Secretary of the Commonwealth:

I am writing in response to the telephone call I recently received from your office, purportedly on behalf of Governor Abigail Spanberger, requesting that I resign my position as Rector and member of the Board of Visitors of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. I since have received from you a letter with Governor Spanberger's signature.

I will be direct: I found that call and the subsequent letter deeply offensive, legally unsupported, and wholly inconsistent with the Governor's own publicly-stated principles regarding the proper relationship between the executive branch and the governance of Virginia's public universities.

Let me begin with a historical fact that apparently has not been considered: in the 154-year history of Virginia Tech, dating to its founding in 1872, no Governor of the Commonwealth has ever removed a member of the Board of Visitors for cause.

Not once.

This is not a minor footnote — it is a testament to the foundational principle that the Board of Visitors functions as an independent governing authority, insulated from the day-to-day political pressures of any particular administration. The mere suggestion that I should voluntarily surrender my lawfully held position is an affront not only to me personally, but to every person who has ever served this institution in a fiduciary capacity.

I am a 1966 graduate of Virginia Tech, and I have devoted the better part of six decades of my professional life to the service of this university and this Commonwealth. That service has never been partisan. I have served on state boards and commissions under Governors of both parties, including appointments made by Democratic Governors Gerald Baliles and L. Douglas Wilder. Governor Baliles appointed me to the Governing Board of the Virginia Museum of Natural History. Governor Wilder reappointed me. I served for ten years, including being chairman of the governing board.

I was appointed to the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors in 1997 by Governor George Allen, reappointed by Governor Jim Gilmore, and I continued to serve under Democratic and Republican Governors alike without interruption or controversy. I served as Rector of the Board from 2002 to

2004 and was reappointed to the Board in 2010 by Governor Bob McDonnell and again in 2023 by Governor Glenn Youngkin. More importantly, I have been confirmed each time unanimously, by Democrats and Republicans, to the Board of Visitors. **Throughout all of these terms, spanning multiple administrations of both parties, not a single Governor of any party has seen fit to question my fitness for service or request my departure.**

About the time I first served as Rector at Virginia Tech, I was completing fourteen years of service on the Mary Baldwin University Governing Board.

During this time, I also served on a variety of other commissions including:

- Governor's Commission on Champion Schools: Commission member 1994-1996 – appointed by Governor Allen
- Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Higher Education: Commission member 1998-1999 – appointed by Governor Gilmore
- Governor's Distance Learning Steering Committee: Committee member 1999-2000 – appointed by Governor Gilmore
- Governor's Virginia Commission on Higher Education Board Appointments: Committee member 2010 – appointed by Governor McDonnell

My contributions to Virginia Tech speak for themselves. I orchestrated over \$60,000,000 to support research in chemistry; to support students in civil and electrical engineering; to support students in veterinary medicine; to advance the College of Natural Resources; and to advance several other worthy enterprises and the university.

I played a central role in Virginia Tech's admission to the Atlantic Coast Conference.

I founded the Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine, which I have continued to chair for the last 25 years.

I served on the board of the Virginia Tech Foundation for 20 years, including a term as Chairman. I served on the board of the Virginia Tech Alumni Association for 11 years, including a term as President. I also served on the board of the Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets Alumni Foundation. I serve on the board of the W.E. Skelton 4-H Educational Conference Center, where I have served as President for the last 25 years. The Shooting Sports Complex at the 4-H Center bears my name in recognition of my support. I received the University's Alumni Distinguished Service Award in 2000. I received the Virginia Tech Corps of Cadet Distinguished Alumni Award in 2025.

I have served on the Advisory Board of Virginia Tech's Pamplin College of Business for 55 years, including two terms as Chairman.

I have served on the Virginia Tech College of Engineering's Committee of 100 for over 35 years, including two terms on the Executive Advisory Board.

I have served on every Virginia Tech Capital Campaign.

In the Roanoke community, I have served on the Virginia Tech Carilion Steering Committee, the Board of the Taubman Museum of Art (9 years), and currently have served 25 years on the Board of the Western Virginia Foundation for Arts and Sciences, including as Chairman for the last 10 years.

I continue to serve on other governing boards, including Bluefield University, Appalachian College of Pharmacy, and the Auburn University Research and Technology Foundation.

I never have served for personal gain, for partisan advantage, or for any purpose other than the betterment of Virginia Tech and the students it educates. I challenge anyone to identify a single action I have taken on this Board that was inconsistent with the university's mission or the interests of the Commonwealth.

What makes the Governor's apparent request all the more remarkable is that it stands in direct contradiction to her own solemn, public commitments. In a November 2025 interview with *The Washington Post* — before she had even taken the oath of office — Governor Spanberger stated unequivocally that **“the governor's role is to appoint people. That's it. That's how it's always been, until recently.”** She pledged that she would not weigh in on board decisions the way her predecessor did, and that she would “largely not interact with board members after appointing them.” She explicitly criticized her predecessor for political interference in university governance and held herself out as the candidate who would restore normalcy and independence to Virginia's higher education institutions.

A telephone call from the Secretary of the Commonwealth asking a sitting Rector to resign is not “staying out of universities’ business.” It is precisely the type of gubernatorial interference that Candidate Spanberger built her higher education platform on opposing. Governor Spanberger cannot simultaneously condemn political interference in university governance as an “aberration” and then, within months of taking office, direct her Secretary to strong-arm a sitting Rector into vacating a position he holds by lawful appointment. That is not reform — that is the same conduct she denounced, merely with a different political beneficiary.

To be clear: I hold my position as a member of the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors pursuant to a lawful appointment by Governor Youngkin, confirmed in accordance with applicable state law. Under Virginia Code § 23.1-1300, a governor may remove a board member only for malfeasance, misfeasance, incompetence, or gross neglect of duty, and must set forth the specific reasons for any such removal in a written public statement. No such grounds exist. I have committed no malfeasance. I have not been derelict in my duties. I have attended meetings, fulfilled my obligations, and acted at all times in the best interests of Virginia Tech. A telephone request for voluntary resignation, made without written justification and without any identified basis in law, is not a lawful exercise of executive authority — it is an improper attempt to circumvent the legal protections that exist precisely to shield board members from political pressure.

I am aware that this request arrives in the context of the Board's ongoing presidential search following President Tim Sands' announcement of his departure. I want to state for the record that I committed to Governor Spanberger that her new appointees, whose terms begin July 1, 2026, would be included on the presidential search committee. I appointed them when the Search Committee was formed. That commitment was made and reported publicly. The Governor's interest in having her appointees participate in this consequential decision is understandable, and

I have accommodated it. That accommodation did not require, and does not justify, a demand for my resignation.

As I said to you, I will not resign. I was appointed to serve a term, I have served that term faithfully, and I intend to fulfill my obligations to the students, faculty, and people of Virginia who depend upon the proper governance of this great university. Governor Spanberger's letter failed to state my specific cause, as the law requires. I am confident she will find no such grounds.

I showed respect to the Governor when I called her directly to discuss the Board of Visitors. I am disappointed that she could not show me the same respect by speaking through a subordinate rather than speaking to me directly.

Virginia Tech deserves better than to be made a political football. I have given too much of my life to this institution to stand by silently while its independence is threatened — regardless of which party holds the Governor's office.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John G. Rocovich, Jr." The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

John G. Rocovich, Jr.

*cc: Governor Abigail Spanberger
Members, Virginia Tech Board of Visitors
Moss & Rocovich, P.C. (file)*