
President's Advisory Panel on University Namings and Recognitions
Town Hall

March 1, 2018

Roberts Hall, Room 101, 425 West Jefferson Street

9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Panel Attendees:

Members

Renisha Gibbs- Chair
Maxine Jones
Janet Stoner
Robyn Jackson
Maxine Montgomery
Chris Pinango

Support Staff

Elizabeth Hirst
Danni Staats

The meeting began at 9:02 a.m.

- Welcome

Renisha Gibbs welcomed the audience to the second of five town hall meetings being hosted by the President's Advisory Panel on University Namings and Recognitions, and thanked everyone for coming out. She introduced herself as the Associate Vice President for Human Resources at Florida State University [FSU] and explained that her role was to serve as Chair of the panel, which was made up of a diverse group of students, staff, faculty and alumni. Ms. Gibbs then proceeded to make the additional statements as follows:

The charge before the panel is to listen, learn and, finally, make recommendations on policies concerning campus names, including buildings and statues. In order to get there, we are conscientiously and continually gathering facts and opinions to help us shape thoughtful ideas on how to best memorialize the university's historical and cultural past in a way that reflects our core values today.

Since the panel's first meeting in October, we've been educated on how other campuses are dealing with this same challenge. We've heard from archivists and legal experts to become better informed about relevant historical and legal facts. In addition, we've listened to passionate students and alumni who have shared their own research and sentiments about specific campus recognitions. As a result of the public input we've received so far, President Thrasher has asked us to initially focus on B.K. Roberts Hall, Francis Eppes Hall, and the Eppes statue.

The panel has been immersed in learning the details about these specific landmarks, and as such, we urge speakers today to help us broaden the conversation. More specifically, we'd like to hear your perspective in three significant areas:

- What impact have these landmarks had on you and/or others? What message do you and/or others think these landmarks are communicating?
- What role should university history play in our current day campus environment?
- What do you think should be done and why (i.e., suggestions for solutions)? Are there additional options besides removing and/or renaming?

In the interest of time, each speaker will be limited to 5 minutes. If you don't have the opportunity to speak today we encourage you to provide your input online. You can find a link to the President's Advisory Panel website on FSU's homepage, where you can offer feedback and review other information. We are committed to ensuring the work we do is transparent, inclusive and respectful. We ask that all views expressed today be respected, consistent with our values as a university. Behavior contrary to those values will not be tolerated and we will not allow these proceedings today to be disrupted.

Ms. Gibbs concluded by thanking the attendees for being there and welcoming the first speaker to come forward.

- Public Comments

[Comment #1]

Name: Daniel Clibbon

Affiliation: Student

Statement: I've spoken in front of you twice already, at your administrative meetings but, I was speaking off the cuff, and I have something more prepared now, that I think reflects how I actually feel. A person should not be defined by the worst thing they've ever done. B.K. Roberts helped start the District Court of Appeal system, and the Florida Public Defender system that we all benefit from today. The poor and the rich alike have both gained from the system of checks and balances of the adversarial and appeals system that Roberts helped to create. He was also a founder of a wildlife foundation created in an effort to preserve Wakulla Springs, a park I've been to many times. He was also one of the founders of our Law School, a school that I care very much about and that has given me direction in life that I did not have before. Roberts was also a segregationist, and while serving as the Chief Justice of the Florida Supreme Court, he denied Virgil Hawkins admission to UF Law School two times, based solely on his race, in defiance of the US Supreme Court. Roberts thought that the State's right to limit and put obstacles in front of integration outweighed Black people's right to an equal education. Roberts also managed a losing gubernatorial campaign for former Ku Klux Klan (KKK) member Fuller Warren. Warren eventually became the Governor of Florida, and he appointed Roberts to the bench. Some people are upset at the idea of what they call "erasing history", I understand that feeling, it is critically important to know where we come from, to acknowledge that people do not fit into the categories of "good" and "bad", and to learn from the mistakes of the past. It is also critically important to recognize that the living are more important than the dead. We should not harm the people alive today in order to honor the idea of a dead person, an idea which may or may not be

accurate. Those who know the Law School that they attend is named for a person who would've refused their admission based on their race are more important than the memory of a man who has long since passed. A person who lies is not forever a liar, a person who steals something is not forever a thief, and a person who kills someone is not forever a killer. Every person, alive and dead, is deserving of mercy. Roberts too is deserving of this mercy. There is some dispute about whether he held his beliefs up until his death, but regardless of that truth, Roberts is more than the worst decisions he has ever made. He was a complicated man, and one who will be remembered for both his successes and his failures, but his name should not be on this building. The people who we name buildings after, who we build statues of, who we decide to give permanent recognition of their achievement, should be people who we hold out to be the best and most deserving among us. It is as wrong to call Roberts an evil man as it is to call him a good man. But the person for whom a Law School is named should tip the scale towards good, not waver in the face of justice. A place where we all learn and share ideas should be named after someone who fought for that progress, not someone who fought against it. There's a difference between someone who is a man and woman of their time, and a person who desperately fought against a tidal wave of racial change. A person should not be defined by the worst thing they've ever done, but neither should we forget that thing. Mercy can still be given to the dead, while the living move on. Thank you.

[Comment #2]

Name: Timothy Seiler

Affiliation: Student

Statement: I'm a 1L here at the Law School, and I'm sure we'll hear quite a lot about Mr. Hawkins today from some of the other speakers here, so I'm going to try to focus on B.K. Roberts. I think as was already mentioned, no man is perfect. A lot of people that we highly respect have done very terrible things, either overtly or have been maligned in that way. Senator Bird who recently left the senate, is one of the longest running senators in our nation, was a member of the KKK, well known for recruiting at least 150 people into the organization. People still respect and honor all the good work that he did in the senate. Mother Teresa, as amazing a figure as she is, she's been maligned in many ways for spreading Catholic values that have increased over population and the spread of STD's in impoverished communities. The question before us today, is what has Roberts done. Roberts took a very fractured, broken court system in Florida, and he restructured it to the system that we still use today. He founded the public defender's office as was already mentioned, which has helped impoverished communities for both minorities and everyone in general. He was also on the Supreme Court of Florida from 1948 to 1976, a very long tenure. Serving 3 times as the Chief Justice, the first time being the youngest Chief Justice of any state in the nation. During the time that he was not the Chief Justice he was still known to really control the court and guide its decisions, even whenever he wasn't in absolute power of the court. Most importantly to this conversation, he worked ceaselessly for ten years to found our law school. Without B.K. Roberts it is very likely that FSU Law would not exist, because at the time there was a policy that the public school system in Florida would not duplicate services, and there was already a Law School at UF, leading to the argument that we should not make one at FSU when we combined the men's and women's colleges. B.K. Roberts was a man of his time. The segregation directives that he put down were not right, they were terrible, they were against the flow of history, and they set Florida back. There's no defense at all for anything he did in defying the Supreme Court there, but it's also important to remember that

every single person at UF went along with that decision, other members of the Supreme Court of Florida went along with that decision, lower courts went along with that decision, the legislature of Florida did nothing to overturn him, and the Governor of Florida did nothing to overturn him. He was not alone in this. He cannot be maligned as an independent voice in this. I think it's also important to remember that we cannot just simply rip the name off the side of the building. This is something that if we do is going to take considerable effort and expense. Roberts name was put up as a matter of legislation, and to change it, legally, which should matter to the Law School, will take an act of legislation. Any law being passed through the Florida legislature is going to take lobbying, time, and expense to get through. Now I think it's important that Danni Vogt mentioned on his website "renameBKRobertshallnow.org", the original proposal in the 1980's when this matter was first brought to the public's attention as a problem, was to name the library that was still in construction after Virgil Hawkins. I think that that is a very fitting resolution to this, because we still have no name on the library. We can very easily name the library after Virgil Hawkins, and put up a plaque in folder city that explains exactly who B.K. Roberts was, the good that he did for our school, and for Florida in general, and also all of the terrible things that he did. Everything that goes into the story of him defying the Supreme Court and tearing down Virgil Hawkins. We should be able to do that so that we can remember that even very good men, people that were very important to history, can still be flawed individuals. So that we don't immediately forget people or give up on ourselves because of our failings and our flaws. Thank you.

[Comment #3]

Name: Freddie Menard

Affiliation: Student

Statement: I remember the speech Dean [Erin O'Hara] O'Connor gave to the incoming class and their parents during orientation. In it, she proudly announced the School's 31% ethnic and racial diversity in its student body. As a minority, I was heartened by this fact, and it made me proud to be able to join this progressive movement at our school. It was meaningful to me to become a student at a school that proudly welcomed diversity. Standing here today, I am proud to be part of this amazing institution, but sadly, I do not feel wholly welcome. My sense of belonging is undermined, because on the walls of our school we continue to give honor to a man who throughout most of his career fought against the very thing that Dean O'Connor boasted about. Our school continues to pay homage by displaying the name of a man who did not want ethnically and racially diverse students to attend law school alongside Caucasians. A man who wouldn't want me to be here. And for every day that I walk into this building displaying his name and walk these halls, I feel like an outsider. I have worked phone-a-thon for the past two semesters, and have spoken to donors who have voiced their disgust with the continuous display of Roberts's name on our building. This name has prevented our school from receiving donations and the support of some of our alumni. Is it worth it? To have people who are alive now, alive today, not give back to their alma mater because they do not want to be seen as affiliated with racism or segregation. There is no doubt about what message is being portrayed by Roberts's name on our building. The message being communicated is that FSU is unbothered by the racist actions and history surrounding Roberts, and that him being a pivotal actor in the creation of our Law School trumps the values and ideas of equal protection. Is that something that we want our school to be known for? I am not contesting that Roberts is important to the history of our school, and I am not trying to erase history or suggest that we forget about the founders of our

school, but we must recognize that Roberts's history is something that we shouldn't desire to be associated with as an institution. Right now, with his name on our building, it gives the impression that his views are synonymous with the views of our school. Robert's wasn't just a flawed figure of his time, like our past presidents who owned slaves during the era of slavery. He was actively on the opposing side of social change. He did everything in his power to reject the progress of the Civil Rights era, and made no secret of supporting leading members of the KKK. Roberts founded the Public Defender's Office in 1963, but when he founded it, he did not intend the Public Defender's Office to benefit minorities of this time, and it was not created to fully protect citizens who were not even able to vote at the time. The atmosphere in the Law School can never be fully welcoming or inviting so long as this building bares the moniker of a man who defiantly denied the equal rights of minorities. For these reasons, I respectfully ask for the removal of B.K. Roberts's name from our school's building. Thank you.

[Comment #4]

Name: Tarranna Franklin

Affiliation: Student

Statement: I am currently a 3L from North Carolina, and it is my pleasure to stand before you this morning in regards to the renaming of FSU College of Law. Today I stand not only as a current law student, but as a double minority, both African-American, and a woman, as well as the current President of the Black Law Students Association. I thank you for your time and commitment to the matter at hand. Although I hold the title of the President of the Black Law Students Association, by no means do my words or thoughts shared with you today reflect the voice of our entire organization. There are some members who have chosen to speak individually, and those that have chosen to respectfully remain silent. While there are some who have declined the right to comment, there are several that stand in silence, but in solidarity. This is displayed through the article of clothing that they have chosen to wear. Today, we wear black. Today, I wear black, with my shirt tagged with the words 'Black Lawyers Matter'. Our black does not represent adversity or hostility, but instead it reflects our unity as an organization. We stand in solidarity with those who support the renaming of our beloved Law School. Before starting Law School in 2015, I first attended North Carolina A & T University, which is a historically Black College and University. In fact, the group known as "The A & T 4", which staged a sit-in at the Woolworth Counter in Greensboro, North Carolina is one of our most proud moments in history that my school holds. Many of you may know that these brave students who stood against racism, attending a University that was created for students of color like myself when they weren't allowed to attend other Universities, or mistreated in their attempt to attend, is something that I value and hold near and dear to my heart. When deciding where to attend Law School, I sought out schools who carried similar principles, and whose focus was on expanding diversity within their Law School and the legal profession. My search led me to FSU College of Law, where I proudly boast about my acceptance and attendance. When I made the decision to attend FSU College of Law, it was a decision that I knew would change the rest of my life. It was a decision that I considered as an investment, and one that wasn't made lightly. Upon arriving to FSU College of Law, I wasn't aware of its history in regards to B.K. Roberts, Virgil Hawkins, or FAMU Law. In fact, it was by random chance that I became aware that the school was named after an individual. Not only do we have little to no signs that display Roberts' name, but it is rare that it is addressed by students, faculty, or staff in this manner. Upon hearing the history of the Law School, I became astonished and disappointed. While we can't change the history of our

school, I did feel as if such information was omitted when I was applying and currently as I attend, as a law student. During my first year an individual who for years had tried to get the name of the Law school changed, approached me and notified me of the history and what efforts had been made to get the name changed. I sought out the advice of others, and was told that not only was it not the time, but that as a student this wasn't my cross to bear. I was again approached last year as a 2L and while I felt the need to take a stance, it seemed as if no one was aware of the issue. It was as if this was an unspoken truth that no one dared to speak about. This year I again was approached and felt the need to take a stance. However, I wanted to make sure that my stance did not create an "us against them" mentality or environment. I was delighted to hear of President Thrasher's decision to create the President's Advisory Panel to address this issue. While I'm quite sure that you are aware of the history of B.K. Roberts and FSU College of Law in general, I want to be sure that you understand that the decision to rename the Law School doesn't just affect our history, but our present and our future. Until the day that I die, I will always be connected to FSU College of Law. I graduate on May 6, 2018, and I want to be just as proud today, tomorrow, and many years from now as I was the day I made the decision to attend this great law school. Keeping the name B.K. Roberts on this law school not only tarnishes our history, but it effects my disposition each and every day I step foot into these doors. I am in a place named after a man who fought very hard to keep people like me, black people, minorities, out of this very place. A person who was widely known for his racism, in regards to FSU College of Law, and within the state of Florida. Roberts doesn't represent who I am, or who I will ever aspire to be. Instead he represents many others that have made it their mission to ensure that every person is not given a fair opportunity to succeed in life. If you make the decision to keep the name B.K. Roberts on this law school, not only are you saying I don't matter, but you are saying that those who stood before me and those who will come after me don't matter either. While I mentioned earlier that I stand as an individual, that is only in regards to my position as the President of the Black Law Students Association. Those I do proudly stand for, are the very people who never had the opportunity to speak. Those who spoke out against oppression, and racism, and those who carried the weight of the world on their shoulders. I hope that you too decide to stand with me and my ancestors who fought for the very thing that I fight for today. Today, I fight for equality, justice and peace. And in closing, I have 3 quotes. In the words of Rosa Parks: 'Racism is still with us, but it is up to us to prepare our children for what they have to meet, and hopefully we shall overcome.' In the words of Mallalah: 'I speak not only for myself, but those without voice, those who have fought for their rights, their right to live in peace, their right to be treated with dignity, their right to equality of opportunity, their right to be educated.' And lastly in the words of John F. Kennedy: 'If we cannot now end our differences, at least we can help make the world safer for diversity'. Thank you.

[Comment #5]

Name: Jonathan Marcelo

Affiliation: Student

Statement: I first want to say it's been heartfelt to hear everyone come speak their mind about this issue. I certainly think as a school we need to have this discussion about the naming of our main building. All across the country we've been dealing with 'what are we supposed to do with history', particularly about confederate statues and particularly with this instance about B.K. Roberts. When I first came to Law school I did not know what or who B.K. Roberts was. I thought it was just some random aspect of history that really wasn't connected to me in any sort

of way. It wasn't until later that I looked at who he was, and I think after most of the school knows and acknowledges who he is, we need to sort of think about what this represents for our school. Our class, class of 2019, came at the 50th anniversary. I think it's particularly important that we not only look at the past, but that we look at the future and how we are going to represent our school in an enlightened way. He stood against integration, if the man were standing here today he would say that I don't belong here. I think in those particular lights, we need to examine the man in the complete picture and the whole picture. With respect to saying that we're erasing history by removing his name, I think we need to enlighten ourselves as to what do men of history stand for after it's all said and done. This is not someone who was complicit or had an intimate conversation with someone who said something racist in one particular instance, this is a man who stood at the highest level of court in Florida and began to advocate for segregation, and I think that's something that's particularly important if we're deciding to keep this name, that we're going to say that 'well, we're sort of obfuscating that important part of his legacy.' With that being said, I think we need to find out a different way that we can acknowledge Roberts's accomplishments or contributions to the school in a way that doesn't offend a huge part of our class. I for one think that the name needs to be removed. I think that we should sort of have a different way of commemorating him, possibly a plaque in the hall in some sense. I think the name of the building, the main building particularly needs to be representation of the entire school, not sort of, acknowledgement of the history. In particular, I think there also needs to be acknowledgement of Roberts's role in denying Virgil Hawkins admission to the bar, admission to UF Law School. I think that is intrinsically tied to the creation of FSU in particular, and there needs to be a way to commemorate him as well. In closing I think it's important that we have this discussion, that we go ahead and talk about this situation because I think having this in the background or the foreground of not addressing it is only going to lead to further anger and distrust among our classmates. All I would say is thank you for coming here today and everyone who's come in here before to speak about this issue because I think it's certainly important that we have this discussion.

[Comment #6]

Name: Chad Sinckler

Affiliation: Student

Statement: I'm a law student here at Florida State University, and I think that bears repeating. I'm a law student here at Florida State University, and part of the legacy of B.K. Roberts was to not allow me to be at a law school here in the State of Florida. That's what he stood for and for 9 years, he kept Virgil Hawkins out of a law school in the state of Florida. That's his legacy and that's what he represents. When I look around at the law school now, I don't think that's what the law school represents. We have The Black Law Students Association, we have the Human American Bar Association, when a hurricane hit Puerto Rico we invited Puerto Rican students to come in to this school and learn with us, and that's part of who we are as a community, that's what we represent. We represent diversity, and we're not perfect but we're moving there, we're moving forward towards that goal. It's just as important to me that when we move forward we acknowledge what happened in the past and move beyond it. Keeping the name as B.K. Roberts is not moving beyond it, it's not progressing forward. I ask, and I hope this panel today takes the note with our history and where we're going, and that the Law School can reflect the community as it is now. The community that we're moving towards, and not a past that hurts me and hurts many other students here. Thank you.

[Comment #7]

Name: Liane LaBauef

Affiliation: Student

Statement: I'm not here to defend B.K. Roberts specifically, that's been done, the arguments been made on that. I'm here more to give a general warning. This trend that we've been seeing across the country of tearing down statues, and renaming streets and buildings, I think it's troubling. It's troubling because I think as all of us here would, I'd love to see the evil of racism and inequity eradicated in this country, but this is not the way to do it. And it's not the way to do it because this might be creating the monster that the proponents of this may actually want to destroy. There's something appealing about repressed information, buried historical figures, it appeals to our darker natures, the darker segments of our society. Why do you think the conspiracy theorists are so gratified by the conspiracies? There's something so empowering about believing in something that's pushed away from the mainstream. I believe that sunlight is the best disinfectant for bad ideas and bad history. Instead of burying it, bring it into the light, that is how you keep things from growing in the shadows. My second point is that nuance is important. We are all a mix of good and evil, we are probably more evil than we would like to admit. Roberts did evil things; no one is denying that. But it's because of him that we're even able to stand here today and we're learning how to eloquently argue whether his name should even be on the building. We're so quick to call our ancestors and our founders savages, malign their morality that they had at the time. I can't help but wonder when we're old and dead and our children and grandchildren are in power, and they're learning about the things that we did, will they call us savages and malign our morality and the things that we tried to do, the best good that we tried to do in our own estimation? Will they see that we are too defective to be worthy of any kind of honor, the same way that we see Roberts. For these reasons, I would like to keep the name of the building B.K. Roberts, but I also would like to name the library 'Hawkins', as has been proposed. In addition, I would like to put up plaques teaching students about who Roberts was, and who Hawkins was, and the story of that. I also would like to encourage students to read the controversial opinion that is causing this whole controversy in the first place, because I didn't even know who Roberts was as most of you have said. I had no idea of that history. Teach the students who he was, bring it to the light. That's the best way to solve this issue. Create this building as a memorial to where we were, where we are now, and where we want to go in the future. I leave you with this quote, or paraphrase rather by George Santayana: 'when experience is not retained, infancy is perpetual, those who cannot remember the past, are doomed to repeat it.' Thank you.

[Comment #8]

Name: Adam Wood

Affiliation: Student

Statement: I'm a 2L, and I've been in FSU as an institution since my undergrad years in 2012, and I'm very happy to be given the privilege to learn here. Before I give my speech, I want to pose a question. If the Law hall had no name, would we name it Roberts Hall knowing what we know today about B.K. Roberts? With respect to monuments, I believe it is important to understand that the act to memorialize is conditioned. It's conditioned on good conduct in life, and the quality of legacy that the person leaves behind. During B.K. Roberts's time, the judicial qualifications commission was enacted. Two of his contemporaries, Vassar Carlton and David L. McCain, on threat of impeachment, resigned. One resigned because it was revealed that he was

in bed with gambling interests. The other resigned due to threat of impeachment. Now, if they had founded the FSU Law, due to what they had done to the integrity of the judiciary, would they be memorialized as say 'Carlton's Hall' or 'McCain Hall'? I don't really think so, and with regards to the legacy that a person leaves behind, I pose another hypothetical. If it was discovered that Roberts had acted improperly, would we keep his name? I do not say this with respect to what he has done being an entrenched segregationist, and with respect to Virgil Hawkins, but what if Roberts ran drugs? Would we keep his name? What if he was revealed to be corrupt? Would we keep his name then? I'm not necessarily sure if we would want that representation as FSU Law, and I point this out not to be hyperbolic, but to say that this is a level of degrees, and I'd also like to think that in South Carolina if there was a Strom Thurmond Law School, or a George Wallace Law School in Alabama, they'd be quick to change and re-evaluate with the times too. [FSU's] motto is 'Vires, artes, mores', meaning strength, skill and character. What does it say that we have B.K. Roberts representing the law school? What did he do with his strength? What did it say about his character with respect to his denial of Virgil Hawkins? And what does it say that he denied that law school of Virgil Hawkins skill? FSU is known for diversity and it is known as a meritocratic institution where we go and share our ideas and contribute. In retrospect, I don't think Roberts necessarily stood for that. As Thomas Jefferson said, one generation does not speak for another. Roberts does not speak for my generation. I do not speak for the generations ahead. I don't think that Timothy, Chad, myself, Jonathan, or any other speaker can rightfully say that they speak for the class of 2058 or say 2060 and with that in mind, perhaps it is better that we just call it 'The Law Hall' instead of Roberts Hall. We shouldn't be too willing to commemorate people whose attitudes and virtues seem fair for its day but not in the future. Man is a temporal creature but monuments last forever and I think we should understand that. And with respect to our history, I find it hard to argue that if we erase the name we'd be erasing history because one of my classmates looked at me the other day and said 'You know, there was never a time that I was in law school that I never knew you'. And that's because me and my classmate are the only four colored men in the 2019 class. With regards to legacies, I think it's fair to state that we still live in the legacy of Roberts, but that being said, we can do better and we can help build a better future. Thank you.

[Comment #9]

Name: Mandi Cohen

Affiliation: Student

Statement: I'm a 3L with the College of Law. I also worked and still work for the State Office of the Inspector General. I've done that for almost 5 years since before Law School. On February 23rd, Dean O'Connor sent an email informing students about this town hall. After reading the email I felt disappointed by the fact that our law school is still named after B.K. Roberts. One sentence of the Dean's email specifically stood out to me: 'While serving on the Florida Supreme Court, B.K. Roberts, authored two opinions that had the effect of protecting the UF College of Law from racial integration, despite the US Supreme Court's mandate and Brown v Board of Education.' As such, Roberts refused to follow a US Supreme Court mandate, which undermines confidence in the US judicial system, and also perpetuated racial segregation in law schools. These actions are so polar opposite to the reasons and the values that drove me to attend law school that I felt sick after reading that email. My understanding is that many judges failed to enforce Brown v Board of Education for a period of time, so I'm not trying to vilify B.K. Roberts. I honestly know nothing about him other than what I read in the Dean's email, but that

was enough for me. There's no reason to search for all of the good things that he's done, I'm sure that he's made, and I've heard about today all of the great things that he's done for the legal community and for the College of Law, but I think that this is a great opportunity to make a positive change. It's not about vilifying Roberts, it's not about erasing history, this is an opportunity to make a positive change and to demonstrate our current values, and our commitment to inclusion, and to promote our confidence in our judicial system. Fifty years from now our community's values will probably change again, I hope they do, they've clearly changed since the 1970's. However, leaving our building named after B.K. Roberts in the present day, sets the tone for our feelings about race, our feelings about inclusion, and the authority of the United States Supreme Court. So I think that updating the name of B.K. Roberts Hall is a positive change and that we should not pass up on that opportunity. Thank you.

[Comment #10]

Name: Bill Davis

Affiliation: Alumni/Lawyer

Statement: I'm really honored to be here and I'm honored because of the words that I've heard before I've come up here. I'm not an expert on this topic, I haven't researched it, but I went to school here. Came here in 1974, graduated in 1977, I'm an FSU Law school alumni. I was here on the lawn when the building was dedicated. I don't remember and I haven't researched, to see if I was in school at the time, I think I was. We had read that opinion on Hawkins, and we had read Justice Carroll's, who was a great Justice, his rather disgusting almost laughable concurring opinion, but to read what Roberts wrote, I think we have to remember the words of Dr. Martin Luther King when he spoke with great disdain for those who spoke with thoughts dripping with the words of interposition, putting the state government in front of the federal government. That's what this case was about, it wasn't about his personal feelings, but about defying the rule of the law. I would say, or sometimes I quip, 'going with the law of rulers' and putting that personal opinion to thrust ahead of the United States Supreme Court. Now, I remember being at that dedication and I don't think the students were really in tune with what was going on. It was just all of a sudden his name, it's like the Civic Center when it was named that was controversial too when it was named after a lobbyist, a then lobbyist, Tucker. We remember the opinion and I remember walking around the outside of the crowd because we were among the dignitaries and we were ridiculing what was going on. One of the reasons is the historical coincidences, or maybe they're not coincidences if you research them, but the first time they kept Hawkins out they said 'Separate but equal that's the way to go'. In the 1950's they created FAMU Law School to be the separate but equal from the University of Florida. They said he could go to FAMU, and then after, the equal part was a joke, separate was what it was all about. In 1965, which was the time of the Selma march, 3 years before Memphis, they decided 'Well I guess we have to integrate Florida', it looks like when you look at the coincidence they opened FSU Law School. But how do they do it? Look at the history, they took away FAMU's Law School, they took the funding and the line items and everything and then shift them over to Florida State. And so we laughed, we said 'look, you really did create FSU', or at least the racism did, because they created FAMU to be separate but equal, and then they used that as a vehicle. If I were to research this, I would go back and say 'Why did they name it after B.K. Roberts in the first place?' I wouldn't just accept what people were telling me, I would want to go and see who were the donors, who was writing letters saying 'name it after maybe our law partner' or something like that. I just can't fathom any good reason for them to have done it except for some very practical

reason that is distasteful now that we know all the history. All I want to say is that as an alum, when I come up here to visit the school or I've got my children with me, the first thing I do is I point to that sign and I tell them the story. Now, one of the speakers was suggesting that's good that's enlightening and maybe it is, but I think it takes away from the Law School, it takes away from the reputation of the Law School and it makes it subject to ridicule. Thank you.

[Comment #11]

Name: Caron Byrd

Affiliation: Student

Statement: I'm a 1L here at Florida State. I'm from Jackson, Mississippi, a state that's even further behind than Florida. When I was choosing my law school, originally I thought I'd stay in my home state and go to Ole Miss Law School. Then in 2012, our first African American president was elected and the student body decided to hang a noose around James Meredith's neck, who was the first black man to attend Ole Miss. I immediately crossed it off my list. I went to undergrad in Birmingham, Alabama, so then I thought I'd go to the University of Alabama's School of Law. Right around the time I was deciding on Law Schools, they had members of the KKK come on campus and put flyers on people's cars. When the BALSAs, who friends of mine are in, asked for police protection on campus, they probably didn't even have any meetings similar to this and they were kind of rejected and ignored. I came to visit Florida State in March of 2017, and on my tour, I found out/already knew that Attorney Benjamin Crump had attended this law school and had represented Trayvon Martin's family after his death. I was just so proud that that was something that FSU boasted about, that they talked about, that they included on their tour. Being from the south, I always wanted to attend school in the South, because I believe in the progress that southern states can make and I wanted to be a part of that as a black female. That's why I chose to come here honestly, because I believed and still believe that out of all of my choices in southern law schools, Florida State is the most progressive and does the most work in terms of promoting diversity among their alumni, promoting diversity within the school, and the things I've been a part of here as a member of BALSAs I don't think I could have done at any other college based on what I experienced and what I heard in my visits and my tours. People say 'what can Florida State do?', and I just believe that Florida State can be the school that sets the record, that sets the trend to be different and apart because they were different and apart for me and why I chose to come here. I also want to add that it's kind of a contradiction to have Virgil Hawkins on the library and a plaque, but still have B.K. Roberts's name on the law school, because it's almost 'which message are you promoting'? In terms of Florida State being different and trying to set a trend, I think you have to choose. We can't say 'let's hold on to the past but also let's promote diversity'. We can't hold onto history while simultaneously trying to move forward. You have to choose one or the other and I think that's what makes it hard because we always want to be in the middle of the road, but we can't. I think that FSU should strongly choose to be on the right side of history, because I think that they are. And to just have a different climate, and to make everybody feel comfortable and belonging because that's why I came. I felt comfortable and I feel like I belong here, I believe I belong here. I believe FSU believes I belong here, and so I think that they should change the name of the school. Thank you.

[Comment #12]

Name: Christina Henry

Affiliation: Student

Statement: I'm a 1L here at the college of Law. I just wanted to say that when I was first interested in Florida State College of Law, it was actually during the summer for undergraduates program that's provided for undergraduates across the country to come and visit and learn more about the law school and just law in general to see if it's something that they really want to pursue. During my time there, we were exposed to a lot of attorneys from across the Tallahassee community, a lot of prominent African American attorneys as well, and we also had the opportunity to have attorney Ben Crump come and speak to our classroom. All of these things really showed to me that FSU valued diversity in the legal community and were devoted to making sure their law students were also devoted to diversity. Having this name displayed on our law school every day as we walk in is really not representative of what I believed that I was coming into when I came into this Law School. Although I am very proud of this law school, I feel like other students who are coming in also don't really have the proper representation if they're coming into a law school that is named after someone who did not value black lives in the legal profession. I've heard over and over today that we're erasing history somehow by taking this name off of the law school. I think if anything we're trying to uplift what this law school is currently trying to be, a school that's representative of diverse backgrounds, representative of people from all over. We have students who speak different languages, we have people who come abroad to study, we've had people come from Puerto Rico to study, and this name is not showing what we are actively trying to do and the things that we have done consistently over the years. I just want us to not be on the wrong side of history, and yes of course he has done things that have promoted the law school in certain ways, but, it doesn't mean that just because he's had some impact on the law school that he has to be memorialized on the front of our building. We know his history now and now that it's brought to the light I feel like we should move past it, and try to focus on the positive aspects of our law school. I believe renaming it would be the best option for us and really help us to move forward and help to be representative of what our law school is trying to be currently. Thank you.

[Comment #13]

Name: Kody Glazer

Affiliation: Student

Statement: I'm a 2L at the college of Law, and I wasn't planning on speaking today so I'll be very brief. You may not be surprised, but I'm white. All my best friends here are black, and some of the best friends I have here and people that I've met are people of color. Knowing that if B.K. Roberts had his way, I would have never met those people is a pretty terrifying thought. At first when I heard about this issue about a year and a half ago, it was a weird feeling because I didn't think it was my fight. I was prepared to be in solidarity with my friends who were more affected by this issue, but it IS personal for me. To personally know that people I care about walk into this school and feel uncomfortable, that's enough for me to think that the school's name should change to something more inclusive, and that's all I'll say. Thank you.

Ms. Gibbs indicated that she had no more comment cards from audience members requesting to speak, and proceed to open the floor to anyone else who wanted to address the panel.

[Comment #14]

Name: Joe Burns

Affiliation: Student

Statement: I'm a 1L here at the college of law. I know the opponents of renaming the building are concerned about forgetting history, and that allowing B.K. Roberts's name to go, he will be forgotten, but I don't feel that there is any danger of that at all. He was a Supreme Court Justice for the state of Florida, his opinions will be recorded forever, and no one will ever forget who the Supreme Court Justices were of this state. There's absolutely no getting around the fact that having a name on a building is an honor for the person who carries that name, and we can do better than Roberts. Every day that his name is on the building is a statement. It's not about the past, it is a present statement that Roberts is a guy that we hold in high regard, and, as the opposition has even said, that's not true. So, let's change the name. Thanks.

[Comment #15]

Name: Bianca Baez

Affiliation: Student

Statement: I wasn't planning to come-up here today, but I felt really compelled to speak. I understand that this topic not only affects black African Americans that are here at Law School. I'm from Latina descent, my mom's American and my dad was Dominican. Sometimes I as a Latina feel the struggles that black African Americans have felt. For me it is hurtful that we have B.K. Roberts as the name of our Law School. I think we definitely can do much better. There are a lot of great people that are professors at our law school or who have been, that have done great things for Tallahassee, and for the law community. I think that we should strongly go forward and change the name. As a lot of you have already mentioned, history's not going to be erased, history is there. He did do some great things, but he also did terrible things. Some people accepted segregation back in the day and some people didn't, but now, it's not our thing, it doesn't represent FSU.

[Comment #16]

Name: Robert Walters

Affiliation: Student

Statement: I'm a 1L here at FSU Law School, and like many of the last speakers I didn't think about speaking either today, but, the irony should not be lost on us today that 50 years ago yesterday, the Kerner Commission Report was released. One of the most impactful statements from that report was that our nation is moving toward 2 society's; one black, one white. Separate, and unequal. As many of you probably heard on the radio over the last couple of days, that society of people who looked at the Kerner Report originally, they revisited it, and still see an unequal society today for blacks and whites and people of color. As we move forward in this country, we should not be plagued by the sins of our past. We should not allow our fore bearers to decide what we are going to do. We should move forward, we should change the name of this law school, because though that I am white, and though that one of my friends asked me yesterday 'How am I affected by this', I am, in fact, affected by this, because my friends here are affected by this. I'm affected because my fellow classmates who I do not know are affected by this. I'm affected by this because future people of color that are coming to this law school may not want to come here because of the name of this hall. That is something that we must change, because no person should not want to come to FSU Law, because of a name of a hall. Let us move forward. Let us change this name. And let us not allow the sins of our fore bearers to plague us today.

[Comment #17]

Name: Ryan Nicholas

Affiliation: Student

Statement: I'm a 1L at Florida State University College of Law, and I'm also an alum, as I went here for undergrad. One of the points that has been made a lot is that this decision to change the name is either changing history or erasing history and I disagree with that because the history is still there. The history and this terrible past is not going away at any time. I think the decision to change the name, is making history. It's making history for Florida State University College of Law, showing that we choose to be more open, we choose to be more diverse, and we choose to be more welcome. I think that that is the history we are taught to make at this law school, it's the type of history that we are encouraged to facilitate and to build here. It's why I'm a proud student of Florida State University College of Law, it's why I'm proud to go here and to have that name beside me at all times. I'm a proud student, on the crest of this university, the torches represent strength, skill, and character. We choose to represent that every single day as a part of this university. We should choose that in the name of our law school. The name of the school has changed as history has gone on. This school, Florida State University, was established as an all-male seminary, west of the Suwanee River, it became Florida State College for Women, and then it became Florida State University. The school changed, as our student body changed, as history changed. The Law School's history, its student body, its vision, and everything has changed since its establishment, and since it was named B.K. Roberts hall. I think we should recognize that in the future, and change the name. Thank You.

Ms. Gibbs confirmed that there were no additional comments and then thanked all of the speakers for their very passionate feedback. She noted that the panel had three more town halls scheduled and encouraged anyone who wasn't ready to speak today to come out to one of those or submit feedback to the panel's website, if they preferred.

- Adjourn

Ms. Gibbs, once again, thanked everyone for their engagement and for helping shape the future of Florida State University, then adjourned the meeting.

The meeting ended at 10:09 a.m.