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GOOD JOB, DR. GAINOUS. BAD JOB, FAMU BOARD

By PETER C. DOHERTY

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It is good to be able to say something nice about someone.

A long time ago, as I was doing some research in the state archives, I came across a Post-it note stuck to a clipping from the *Miami Herald*. The article highlighted the fact that a state arts board had returned to the treasury a sum of money it did not believe it needed. The note attached to the article was written by a state senator widely regarded as a liberal who wanted nothing more than to tax and spend. But the note gave a different impression. It read, "It is nice that some people don't feel they have to spend every state dollar they can get their hands on." From that day forward, I felt a little better about that senator, and a report the other day has given me reason to feel good about someone else.

Dr. Fred Gainous, who took over on July 1 as the new president of The Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University in Tallahassee, better known as FAMU, made a good decision even before he took office. The FAMU president's house is prone to flooding and is badly in need of repairs. Estimates on the cost of the repairs run between \$120,000 and \$300,000 depending on what is done to refurbish the house and stop the flooding.

Gainous, who had planned to move into the house upon assuming the presidency, was made aware of the condition of the house shortly after accepting his new job. He decided to forego living there and to use the building as a special events center for the university instead. Now this would not be very newsworthy except for what Gainous did next—he said that he did

not think state funds should be used for the repair project. Rather, he said, FAMU should find the money from other sources such as alumni, boosters, and so forth. Now *that was* news.

I have a hard time recalling when last I heard of a state official ruling out the use of taxpayer dollars for a significant project. And I have an even harder time recalling if I ever heard of any state official who did so as almost his first act in office.

I have no doubt that the FAMU project will be fully funded—and probably overfunded—by the private contributions Gainous wants. Equally I have no doubt that it will be a long time before I hear of another such episode. Indeed, at almost the same time the new president was getting himself off to an exemplary start, the FAMU Board of Trustees was racing in the opposite direction by voting for a whopping presidential compensation package that will have the effect of creating a salary war among Florida's universities. After all, no university will want to be seen as cheap when it comes to presidential pay. Yet this action of FAMU's Board in no way dilutes the pleasure I take in the actions of Dr. Gainous. If the remainder of his tenure lives up to the standard set by his first decision, the university and the state of Florida will reap benefits beyond measure.

In the meantime, maybe his prudence will rub off on the board.

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