



An Open Letter to the Rensselaer Community      15 Sept 2017

TO: All RPI Students, Alumni, Faculty, Staff and Friends of the Institute:

As a former PU, it was with great sadness and concern for my alma mater that I read a recent memorandum from RPI's Vice President for Human Resources. In that memorandum, Curtis Powell was attempting to explain to the current GM and PU the legal basis for the Administration's sole discretion to hire a new Student Union Director. In my opinion, he totally missed an opportunity to heal a festering wound – although no one following this ongoing spat should harbor the illusion that this memorandum was solely his creation.

During the turbulent 60's, when most campuses were aflame (figuratively and in some cases literally) RPI was a relative oasis of reason. Not that we were apathetic to the issues of the day, but because many of the 'grievances' that surfaced on other campuses were incrementally ironed out within the RPI community in a spirit of compromise and respect.

While others broke into, and occupied, their Presidents' Offices, RPI's President, Dr. Richard Folsom, invited student leaders to use his office, without his presence, to discuss matters of campus concern. During this stressful time, there was an overarching commitment to reason across the RPI community where dialogue was unbridled and constructive. Sadly, this appears to be the antithesis of what is happening at RPI today.

There is no reason why any member of RPI's Administration should manifest such an egotistical imperative to control the Student Union. RPI's Student Union has, for many years, continued its overwhelmingly successful tradition of positive leadership and accomplishments *by students*, truly unique to institutions of higher learning. Trying to diminish the Union's historical and rightful role by offering legal wrangling about by-laws and constitutions is counterproductive, foolish and damaging to one of the most valuable pillars of Rensselaer's tradition. The Student Union is not what needs reining-in on RPI's campus, if I can be so blunt.

**Renew Rensselaer** - a dedicated group of alumni I represent – is growing both in numbers and concern over the state of our alma mater. We have been working behind the scenes for nearly two years to surface and resolve many issues that RPI faces. We have thoroughly researched these issues, from worsening financials to the declining morale of RPI's community (students, faculty and staff and alumni), that all point to the need for improved governance and more enlightened, focused and transparent day-to-day leadership.

We met with the Board of Trustees leadership on two occasions and have shared our concerns, our research and our suggestions which are now embodied in our Platform. Specifically, we recommended last April that the Trustees issue a statement affirming the traditional and unique independence of the Student Union within very broad guidelines that can only be overturned by the Board. Unfortunately, they have not taken action.

Over the past two years, **Renew Rensselaer** has chosen to encourage constructive change within the family and out of the public eye. This latest provocation by the Administration may signal that it is time to change our tactics. In closing, it's becoming more and more obvious that RPI is in need of renewal.

Sincerely,

Bill Criss, '68 & '69G

78<sup>th</sup> President of the Union

Patroon of Rensselaer, Albert Fox Demers Medal Recipient, Livingston W. Houston Awardee