

Statement from Outgoing Board President Tom Watjen '76 Regarding Board of Visitors Appointments June 28, 2024

For a state supported institution of higher education, one of the most important decisions the governor makes is the appointment of members to serve on the Virginia Military Institute Board of Visitors. The governor recently [announced his appointments](#) for the upcoming year. Before getting to those, I want to thank the three departing members of the board for their service to the Institute. Each of these individuals made significant contributions and will be missed:

- Scot Marsh '81
- Gussie Lord '01
- Lester Johnson '95

I'm grateful Scot Marsh was able to serve two four-year terms, which afforded him opportunities to serve in several key roles including as chair of the Cadet and Military Affairs Committee. Conversely, I am disappointed that Gussie Lord and Lester Johnson were not reappointed and will be leaving us so soon. They have each made strong contributions to the board and have served as committee chairs bringing diverse experiences and perspectives that will be sorely missed.

While I look forward to the contributions of the newly appointed board members, I am disappointed in how politicized the board appointment process has become, impacting board experience and continuity. This lack of continuity changes the boardroom dynamics and leads to a board that is potentially less experienced and lacks diversity of race, gender, sexuality, political affiliation and ideology. My tenure on the board, which includes my time as board president, has shown that VMI and our board benefited in the past from having a diverse group of board members. I also believe the politization of the process energized others to use VMI to promote personal and/or political agendas which are distractions from the job at hand. Board members should be solely focused on fulfilling VMI's mission and purpose which is to educate and train the leaders of character so needed today.

As noted, the governor has announced his new appointments to the Board of Visitors. My comments above are in no way intended to take away from our new members' experience. I am very pleased Kate Todd was reappointed and I'd like to extend my warm welcome to our new members including:

- Clifford Foster '93
- Quinton Elliott '85
- Bill Janis '84

I want to thank all these individuals, as well as our current board members, for the commitment made to the Institute and the Board of Visitors. I know that each will do their part to protect the mission and purpose of the Institute. I trust they will continue to help move VMI forward.

Tom Watjen '76