

# Panel to consider removing homosexual resident advisor

By Mike Vitez  
Assoc. Projects Editor

University President Frank L. Hereford Jr. has appointed a special committee to advise him on the possible removal of a professed homosexual from the Resident Staff program.

Resident Staff officers interpreted Hereford's action, taken last Friday, as an attempt to resolve a potential public relations problem, citing conversations with Hereford and evaluations of the dormitory counselor's performance as evidence he could not have been concerned with the homosexual's capabilities as a counselor.

The committee is expected to reach a decision on whether to remove second-year student Bob Elkins from his post in Hancock dormitory by Friday, according to several sources familiar with the situation.

The final decision on the status of Elkins, who is also president of the Gay Student Union (GSU), will be made by Hereford himself, according to students and administrators involved.

Hereford would not comment beyond saying he had established the committee, chaired by former Vice President for Health Sciences Kenneth R. Crispell.

Hereford explained his "no comment" by saying he did not want "to influence the committee in any way."

Student Affairs and Resident Staff officials have said Elkins is doing an excellent job as a first-year Resident Staff member.

The 20 students on Elkins' hall have signed a petition asserting that Elkins is performing well as their advisor, and asking that he be retained as an advisor there, one hall resident said.

Crispell, whom many administrators have described as a long-time friend of Hereford's, would only say his committee had been formed "to investigate problems in the Resident Staff."

He declined to comment on the number of committee members, their names, or the committee's possible procedure.

Resident Staff Co-Chairman Ted Bruning said that in conversations on the subject of removing Elkins,

Hereford gave him the impression that "he felt he had to react somehow" to having Elkins on the Resident Staff, since Hereford would be "on the spot" if a parent or Board of Visitors member complained about having a homosexual Resident Staff member.

"It could be an emotionally charged issue, and I think he wanted to be able to say, 'well, I've been studying the problem, I've set up a committee,'" Bruning said.

Bruning and Dean of Students Robert T. Canevari said Resident Staff members and others involved in the selection process were aware of Elkins' affiliation with the GSU before he was chosen for the program, and were satisfied that he would be a good advisor.

Canevari noted that Elkins passed several tests and at least two interviews before he was selected last spring, and added that a committee of Resident Staff members discussed the problems posed by Elkins' homosexuality last spring before the selection process was completed.

Assoc. Dean of Students Chester R. Titus met with Elkins and Dave Verklin, the senior advisor in Hancock dormitory, "prior to the beginning of school," Canevari said, adding that all participants were satisfied with the results of the interview.

Elkins survived a "very strenuous" selection process, and "from all indications I have personally heard, or seen, he is doing an excellent job," Canevari said, adding that the fact that Elkins is still on the Resident Staff "should speak to the issue of how we (administrators in the office of the Dean of Students) feel about him."

Bruning said Elkins' sexual preferences were "not a concern" to the students and administrators heading the Resident Staff program because "our only concern is how well he does his job."

"Mr. Hereford's concern is broader than that, and perhaps rightfully so," Bruning said, explaining that based on his conversations with Hereford, he thinks Hereford is acutely aware of the possible ramifications Elkins' presence on the Resident Staff would have for "the legislature, the Board of Visitors and big alumni (sic)."

Hereford has also said he is concerned about a "potential conflict of interest" between "what the GSU has as its stated aims in its constitution and what Bob's job would be as an RA," Bruning said.

The "purpose" section of the GSU's constitution states that the GSU's purpose and aims are to "establish justice, insure understanding, provide gay social activities, promote positive self-regard, and secure recognition" for homosexuals.

Elkins said he has retained Charlottesville lawyer John C. Lowe, who represented the plaintiffs in the suit which forced the University to become coeducational.

Lowe said yesterday that "Bob Elkins will remain a member of the Resident Staff and will continue to do the good job that he has done so far."

Precedents show if he were fired, that Elkins probably could bring suit against the University for violating his rights to equal protection, due process, free speech and expression, possibly for violation of contractual agreements and of state administrative rights for state employees.

Lowe declined to comment on what action he might take if Elkins is removed.

Verklin said he is "behind Bob 100 per cent."

"He's a great RA, he's had an exemplary showing as an RA, and he's potentially the best one I've got," Verklin added.

Resident Staff Co-Chairman Mark Giles said Elkins "was selected through the official selection process, and I stand behind that process."

Bruning said he doesn't think "anyone should be removed without pretty serious cause, and I've yet to be shown that there's good cause in this case."

Publicity would "have a negative effect" on the committee "and I'll be thrown off the hall," Elkins said.

He added that his family did not know of his sexual preferences, and said he feared the consequences of their finding out he was a homosexual through the press.