

Gallagher reflects on Pitt's growth

GALLAGHER, FROM A-1

education: Public confidence in higher education is at a historic low, tuition costs are rising, schools are still coming to terms with pandemic struggles, and, in Pennsylvania, the Legislature has become increasingly comfortable with questioning Pitt's transparency and operations.

But still, Mr. Gallagher is confident that Pitt, as one of the top research institutions in the country, flourished under his leadership.

"I think this outward focus — looking at Pitt through the regional lens and as an anchor of the region and as something that's part of the region and participates and partners — I think that will have some long-lasting benefits," Mr. Gallagher said.

Growing campus

The Oakland campus looks a bit different from when Mr. Gallagher took over nine years ago.

Logistically, more students make their way around the urban campus than they did in 2014. Oakland's undergraduate enrollment grew by over 6% during the Gallagher era — from 18,757 undergrads in fall 2014 to 19,928 in fall 2022.

Mr. Gallagher said the "modest" enrollment boost happened despite the fact that Pitt was not in a "growth posture." He attributed the increase to new educational options that popped up during his tenure.

Pitt certainly expanded educational and campus opportunities under Mr. Gallagher. In 2017, the university began enrolling students at its first new school in 20 years, the School of Computing and Information. A year later, Pitt established an Office of Sustainability. Construction is currently underway for a Campus Wellness and Recreation Center, a 270,000-square-foot facility that will include a pool, jogging track and basketball courts.

The university has also extended its reach in the Pittsburgh region. In 2018, Pitt opened its first Community Engagement Center in Homewood; three years later, it would open a second in the Hill District. These initiatives come as Pitt touts an economic impact of \$5.2 billion annually.

Simultaneously, Pitt is attracting record numbers of applicants. Over 58,000 people vied for a spot in Oakland's 2023-24 first-year class. That's a staggering boost compared to application numbers from just a few years ago — applicants rose by over 68% between 2021 and 2023.

"A lot of that [growth] reflects a lot of hard work from admissions and Pitt becoming recognized more as a national public university rather than just regional," Mr. Gallagher said. "We're seeing that growing reputation, that growing brand across the whole country."

But Pitt's regional campuses in Greensburg, Johnstown, Bradford and



Courtesy of Michael Ray Photography

The undergraduate enrollment at Pitt's campus in Oakland grew by over 6% during the Gallagher era — from 18,757 undergrads in fall 2014 to 19,928 in fall 2022.

Titusville have followed downward enrollment and application trends similar to those seen by Pennsylvania's state schools, community colleges and Penn State's commonwealth campuses.

The chancellor believes higher education is at a crossroads, in which more expensive, prestigious schools remain in high demand, while more affordable, accessible schools see drops in student populations.

"The question is, 'What does this mean in the long term?' And the honest answer is, we don't know," Mr. Gallagher said. "My biggest fear is that those declines are happening predominantly in first-generation students and lower-income students, and I don't think they're going somewhere else. I think they're forgoing a college education."

Snowballing interest in Pitt's Oakland campus is a sign of relief for university administrators, who three years ago were in uncharted territory when the pandemic hit. Mr. Gallagher said the whole world was "winging it," including Pitt. Like many universities across the country, Pitt temporarily shifted to remote learning options and mandated the vaccine for students and faculty.

In hindsight, the chancellor considers the pandemic to be a distraction from the university's mission. Higher education is largely a social experience, and the pandemic robbed many students and educators of in-person interactions.

"What made COVID so difficult, and so challenging was that it was everywhere," Mr. Gallagher said. "The entire planet was subject to this. That means it impacted everybody all the time. It wasn't just a work issue. It was a home issue, it was our lives, it was travel, it was international, and you didn't know what it was going to end. I think that's a particular type of stress."

Surging costs and concerns

While Pitt's Oakland campus reaps the benefits of

enrollment and application boosts, local and national attitudes toward four-year institutions like Pitt have soured during Mr. Gallagher's tenure.

In 2015, the year after Mr. Gallagher became chancellor, 57% of Americans said they had a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in American higher education. That number has since dropped to 36%, according to a Gallup poll released Tuesday.

Waning trust is attributable to a number of factors, with rising costs and politics often at the forefront.

During Mr. Gallagher's tenure, in-state undergraduate tuition for a general studies student at the Oakland campus rose more than 17%, from \$16,872 in fall 2014 to \$19,760 in fall 2022.

Mr. Gallagher attributed increasing costs in part to lacking state support, while pointing to several programs that Pitt has established to assuage the financial burden for some students, such as the Pitt Success program. He said Pitt student indebtedness has actually declined during his tenure.

"I would love to see the state of Pennsylvania really support its citizens with robust financial aid support and institutional support for their state schools," he said, "but if they won't do that, we have to find other ways to support our students, and the way to do that is to target those that have the greatest need. I think we've made some meaningful steps in that direction."

As tuition costs swelled, Mr. Gallagher's salary went up. Pitt's board of trustees hired Mr. Gallagher with a \$525,000 salary. He ends his chancellorship making \$698,202, a 33% raise. Ms. Gabel, Mr. Gallagher's successor, will earn a base salary of \$950,000.

Mr. Gallagher attributed pricey administrator salaries to the competitive nature of the job. The chancellor, who pledged to give 20% of his salary back to students when the pandemic hit, called it a personal priority to financially support Pitt and its community during his tenure.

"I've benefited from

what's a very competitive market for university presidents and chancellors," he said. "To be honest, I sort of have a mixed view about that. I'm personally not that motivated by that. I mean, I came from government service."

Pitt has also found itself in hot political water during his time. Some Republican legislators and conservative groups have repeatedly criticized the university for its fetal tissue research, high price tag and lack of transparency.

Seeking guaranteed tuition freezes and more openness from Pitt, a majority of House Republicans voted against the university's 2023-24 state funding on July 6. Legislators have yet to approve funding for the state-related schools, including Pitt, in this year's state budget. Pitt uses state money to provide tuition discounts for its in-state students. Mr. Gallagher declined to comment on the state budget.

From the left, some Democrats and liberal groups sharply criticized the university this spring when it refused to cancel a debate — "Should transgenderism be regulated by law?" — hosted by a conservative student group. Opposition to the debate culminated in a tumultuous protest, in which protesters threw an explosive device at police officers and numerous campus buildings were closed. A Regent Square couple were indicted this month for their role in the protest.

The protest made national headlines. Mr. Gallagher believes universities are "soft targets" for those wishing to create disruption at controversial events.

He believes public universities "enshrine and protect" student and faculty viewpoints, while also reflecting the political and cultural debates of the day. He thinks universities are becoming increasingly subject to "ideological scorekeeping" and, in some cases, outside agitators who seek to escalate situations. The chancellor believes universities must learn to "cope" with this while protecting free expression.

"Universities are not monasteries and they're not places that are isolated from the whole world," he said. "They're not ivory towers, and I say this at a university that happens to have one. They are supposed to be immersed in the turbulence of the day. That's where all the discovery and action is."

As he prepares to move from the chancellor's residence to the classroom, Mr. Gallagher said he looks forward to teaching at the department that trained him.

He attended Pitt for graduate school to pursue a teaching career, and joked that he took a "40-year detour" from this career ambition.

"I've taken the strangest path to becoming a professor, maybe ever," Mr. Gallagher said. "Going back to your own alma mater and these different roles is hard to explain... [As chancellor,] you kind of have to pinch yourself sometimes as you walk up to the Cathedral [of Learning] thinking, 'I can't believe I'm back here in Pittsburgh and taking this on.' It'll be the same way... being one of the faculty members."

"It's special."

Secret recording in UPMC case unsealed

UPMC, FROM A-1

the two men had "no reasonable expectation of privacy" when they met in the frequently used surgical observation room five years ago and that what they said can be used in a high-profile medical malpractice case now unfolding in his court.

The judge's decision comes two months after the Post-Gazette obtained a copy of the transcript and published details of the talk between the two longtime doctors, revealing for the first time an exchange that had been off-limits to the public for years.

"Applicable idioms abound: 'the genie is out of the bottle,' 'the horse is out of the barn,' 'the milk has been spilt,' 'the cat is out of the bag,' 'the dirty laundry has been aired,' and one 'can't unring the bell,'" Judge Ignelzi wrote.

The meeting at the heart of the dispute took place on Feb. 26, 2018, in UPMC Presbyterian Hospital in Oakland. Dr. Luketich had texted Dr. Wilson that morning, writing, "If you can, I need a scrip and would like to talk about staff."

The conversation that followed shed light on the internal politics of UPMC's renowned transplant center, including disparaging comments about a Black surgical resident and accusations that then CEO Jeffrey Romoff was pushing to increase the number of transplants to generate greater revenues.

Last month, Dr. Luketich stepped down as department chairman — weeks after the Post-Gazette's story — but continues as a surgeon and researcher.

Dr. Luketich's lawyer, Efram Grail, did not respond to questions about whether he would appeal the ruling.

The judge's decision also opens up hundreds of pages of court documents from a medical malpractice case that had been dominated for months by the fight over the conversation.

Though lawyers for Dr. Luketich had argued the conversation was illegally recorded under the state wiretap law and should be sealed from the public, the judge said the two doctors had gathered in a room that was open to others at the hospital and that the back door had been open "in some manner."

Since last year, the 11-minute tape has been at the center of a malpractice case in which a 64-year-old Aliquippa woman and her husband are suing UPMC and other doctors for what they allege was a botched lung transplant in 2018.

Though Dr. Luketich did not perform the surgery, Bernadette and Paul Fedorka allege that his suboptimal use impaired his judgment and led him to make decisions that drained the department of key resources and contributed to the poor outcome.

While lawyers for the Fedorkas have pushed to use the tape and transcript as evidence of their claims, the details of what the two veteran doctors discussed went far beyond the scope of the lawsuit and triggered an intense effort from UPMC and Dr. Luketich to keep it sealed.

At times, testimony turned to clashes between doctors at UPMC and the nationally known thoracic surgery unit — and arguments over who secretly recorded the conversation.

In court filings, Dr. Luketich blamed two former subordinates who he claimed had targeted him in a vendetta.

Though Dr. Jonathan D'Cunha and Dr. Lara Schaefer denied making the tape or sending it to other colleagues, the judge on Wednesday weighed into the controversy, saying there was ample reason to believe that they were behind the recording.

"Not only are Drs. Schaefer and D'Cunha's fingerprints on the interception of the communication, these fingerprints are on the disclosure of the tape

and transcript," Judge Ignelzi wrote.

The judge also cited much of the infighting at the institution, saying that what was playing out behind the scenes resembles a soap opera.

Dr. D'Cunha had filed a federal whistleblower case against Dr. Luketich and UPMC, accusing the surgeon of carrying out multiple operations at the same time, while Dr. Luketich said his onetime subordinate of retaliating for exposing an affair between Dr. D'Cunha and Dr. Schaefer.

"The Court notes this case could easily be mistaken for a script from the sixty-year current long-running television melodrama, General Hospital," he wrote.

Robert Barnes, an attorney for Dr. D'Cunha, said his client stands by his testimony that he didn't record anything. "Our view is that these claims were frivolous all along."

For his part, Dr. Luketich's lawyer, Mr. Grail, said the surgeon was pleased that the judge singled out the two doctors to "not be credible in light of their exclusive motive, opportunity, admission of aural eavesdropping, and prior conduct."

Dr. Shaheen's lawyer declined to comment.

The judge also took aim at Dr. Luketich, casting doubt on the surgeon's explanations about controversial comments he made about Dr. Schaefer.

During the tape-recorded conversation, Dr. Luketich talked about hiring certain doctors, including Dr. Shaheen, who was then a surgical trainee.

"Well all I know is that I think there are a number of people that could have tapped into that if they wanted to, me included," Dr. Luketich said, before saying he and his wife had a good relationship and "I'm just not interested in [Dr. Schaefer]."

Under questioning during a portion of the court case that had been sealed until Wednesday, Dr. Luketich denied he was making a sexual reference to Dr. Shaheen. Rather, he testified, by "tapped" he meant hiring her as a surgeon.

The judge was skeptical. "This Court finds Dr. Luketich's explanation of his use of the word 'tap' to not be credible when a reasonable explanation of the use of 'tap' in common parlance is a slang idiom for the sexual desire of another. This was abundantly clear to the Court at the time."

Not only did the judge have harsh words for the doctors, he criticized their lawyers who have taken part in the malpractice case. Calling the proceedings "a scintillating saga of operatic proportion," Judge Ignelzi accused the attorneys of "seeking to play their roles not just for the court — but to the media."

In one footnote, he invoked one of the many times he cleared the media and public from the courtroom when testimony turned to the transcript, which was still under seal.

"What is aggravating me, counsel, is you are playing to the fact that there is media here and you just want to throw this man under the bus," said the judge, referring to Dr. Luketich.

The lone person to be spared in the judge's ruling was the couple who initiated the malpractice case: the Fedorkas.

"The only party whose credibility remains intact are that of the Plaintiffs Bernadette and Paul Fedorka, husband and wife," Judge Ignelzi wrote.

Allowing the transcript and recording to remain secret would potentially deprive the couple of key evidence in their case, he said.

"Granting the injunction would harm the only innocent party in this case, the Fedorkas."

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