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Opinion Columnists

Column: Election should lend stability to Virginia Universities

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The recent Virginia election has opened a real possibility for restoring stability and integrity to the commonwealth's public university system. The elections of Abigail Spanberger as governor and Jay Jones as attorney general create an important opportunity to reverse the damaging effects of the President Donald Trump-Gov. Glenn Youngkin-Attorney General Jason Miyares campaign against the boards of visitors and university counsel offices. These efforts must be halted — and will almost certainly be

undone. Board members should be respected professionals who provide oversight to the university, not politicized ideologues. Likewise, university counsel should be respected professionals appointed by the university president.

The recent neo-Nazi controversy at the Heritage Foundation has further eroded confidence in the Youngkin-appointed university rectors connected to that institution. Moreover, the Virginia Supreme Court's decision striking down Youngkin's appointments to the boards of visitors at George Mason University, Virginia Military Institute and the University of Virginia has effectively dismantled what remains of Youngkin's educational legacy.

Youngkin, with a smile, embraced Trump's harsh policies — including those targeting international students — while Miyares enforced them with a snarl. Virginia now has an opportunity to chart a new course and put an end to the inexplicable attacks by the governor and attorney general on the commonwealth's leading universities. Ultimately, Youngkin's most enduring legacy may prove to be the blue wave generated in the recent election, which even produced new Democratic gains in rural counties for the first time in memory.

As a former faculty member at George Mason University who taught international law and global trade for more than 40 years in both the law school and the newer public policy school, I am proud of George Mason University and its president for standing firm against both the Trump and Youngkin administrations. A diverse and global student body is essential to a university education today and competing in today's global economy. This is essential to a broad range of industries in Northern Virginia, Richmond and Tidewater as well as agriculture throughout Virginia.



The new Spanberger administration should be fully prepared to confront the Trump administration in federal court. The federal judiciary has repeatedly shown itself to be a viable — if not the only — battleground for safeguarding the nation from presidential

abuses of power and law. This is underscored even more today by Trump's fierce opposition to the pending Supreme Court litigation seeking reversal of his tariffs, by Trump's newest proposals to dismantle the U.S. Department of Education and his continuous attacks on foreign students — resulting in declining international student enrollment.

What is needed now is strong legal advocacy from the new attorney general and firm leadership from the new governor, supported by the General Assembly and its newly elected members, to aggressively oppose Trump's millionaire-inspired educational policies.

It is encouraging that the new governor has already taken a decisive step regarding UVA by calling for a pause in its presidential search under the Youngkin-appointed Board of Visitors.

Virginia's public universities are essential to the commonwealth's economic development. They have been a driving force in building a highly skilled workforce and have contributed significantly to Virginia's long-standing recognition by CNBC as "the best state for doing business" — a distinction earned more times than any other state.

Just as importantly, Virginia's public universities have played a central role in Virginia's successful engagement in the global trading system for many decades, attracting new businesses and investment and, in turn, expanding employment and prosperity throughout the commonwealth. In the light of the Trump-induced chaos in both domestic and global politics today, a strong public university system is vital to Virginia and is critical to our national interest.

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