# FAMU suspends search for new university president

Contributed by GARY FINEOUT
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TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) - Florida A&M University on Friday abruptly halted its search for a new president after the university board chairman contended it was the wrong time to move ahead with a new leader.

The move came just days before university trustees were expected to interview finalists and possibly hire a permanent replacement for the job. Last July, James Ammons resigned as part of the fallout over the November 2011 hazing death of a drum major aboard a bus.

FAMU so far had attracted fewer than 30 candidates for the position.

But Solomon Badger, the chairman of the FAMU board, said the reason he suspended the search had to do with deadlines the university is under to answer questions about its accreditation.

In December, the university was placed on probation for a year by a regional accrediting organization. The university has one year to prove it is turning itself around or it could have its accreditation revoked by the Southern Association of College and Schools Commission on Colleges. If accreditation is revoked, students won't be eligible for federal financial aid.

"This is neither a commentary on the quality of candidates, nor a questioning of the search process," Badger said in a statement.

"This is just a stark acknowledgment of the fact that FAMU's accreditation is at risk."

Badger added in a statement that it would be irresponsible to interrupt Interim President Larry Robinson's work on getting the university off probation. FAMU must prepare a response for the accreditation agency by August and prepare for an intensive on-site visit in September.

"It would also be eminently unfair to bring in a new president as FAMU's accreditation hangs in the balance," Badger said.

But Al Lawson, a former state senator who was considering applying for the job, questioned the decision and said it was a waste of taxpayer money since the university had hired a search firm to help find candidates.

"I thought it was highly inappropriate and unusual," Lawson said.

The delay, however, could build up momentum to keep Robinson.

Robinson, a former official in the administration of President Barack Obama, initially agreed not to apply for the permanent job of president when he was first appointed. He made the decision to ensure that the university attracted a wide range of candidates for the job. Some alumni, however, have said that trustees should consider letting Robinson become a candidate.

So far a total of 29 people have applied for the post including deans and top officials at such schools as Morgan State University, Delaware State University and Florida Gulf Coast University.

The university is still dealing with the death of Robert

Champion, whose parents are from the Atlanta area. His family has sued the university and prosecutors recently upgraded the charges against defendants in the case to manslaughter. The famed Marching 100 band has been suspended since Champion's death and no timetable has been announced for its return.

FAMU becomes the second Florida university in the last three months to suspend a presidential search. The University of Florida suspended its search in January after President Bernie Machen rescinded his decision to retire.

*Pictured above is Solomon Badger.