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Verdict turns page in Penn State child molestation scandal

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — Penn State is trying to turn the corner on the Jerry Sandusky child molestation scandal, but the former FBI director who authored a scathing report on it more than four years ago says more changes are needed, even after the conviction of the university's former president.

A jury's guilty verdict against Graham Spanier on Friday to a misdemeanor count of child endangerment made him the last of the three former high-ranking administrators to be held criminally culpable for how they handled a 2001 complaint about Sandusky sexually abusing a boy in a team shower.

Penn State issued a statement after the verdict, saying the justice system had produced "closure" in the criminal cases that began with Sandusky's arrest in 2011. The school said Spanier's conviction and guilty pleas by two other former top administrators indicated a "profound failure of leadership."

But former FBI director Louis Freeh said Penn State needs "new leadership and vision" and called on Penn State President Eric Barron to resign.

"Pennsylvania taxpayers, the entire (Penn State) community and responsible political leaders should be 'appalled' by Barron and his entire 'leadership' team," said Freeh.

He had remained largely silent for more than four years, as his report became a target of heated criticism by supporters of Spanier, his former co-defendants, Tim Curley and Gary Schultz, and of the school's Hall of Fame head football coach, the late Joe Paterno.

Curley, then the athletic director, and Schultz, a vice president, pleaded guilty to misdemeanor child endangerment last week and testified for the prosecution. All three men await sentencing.

On Saturday, the chairman of the Penn State board rejected the criticism of Barron, the university's president for the past three years. The school revamped its organization and procedures after the scandal, paid more than \$90 million to settle civil claims and established and funded programs to fight child abuse.

"President Barron has led the creation of a model ethics and compliance program to protect and support the university community," said Chairman Ira Lubert. "He has my full support and appreciation for his leadership and accomplishments."

Lubert said the board "disagreed firmly" with the 2012 Freeh report's criticism of Penn State's culture, an issue that has rankled many within the university community, but has also attracted support.

"There's no other way to read this verdict than to see it as a renouncement of the culture at Penn State," said Tom Kline, a lawyer who represented a young man who testified against Sandusky and Spanier, and settled with the university over a claim of abuse in a team shower at Sandusky's hands.

Trial testimony contradicted statements by both Paterno and Spanier that they were unaware of a 1998 complaint by a woman about Sandusky showering with her son, a matter that was investigated without charges being filed.

Curley and Schultz said the 1998 incident was on their minds when they had to determine what to do about the 2011 incident, when then-graduate assistant football coach Mike McQueary reported to them and Paterno that he saw Sandusky abuse a boy in a team shower late on a Friday night.

Paterno died in early 2012, more than two months after Sandusky was charged with molestation and Curley and Schultz were charged for their handling of the matter. Paterno was never charged with any crime, but the trial added to the evidence he was involved in handling both the 1998 and 2001 complaints.

"This has always remained a series of moons circling the Paterno planet," Kline said. "The center of their universe is Paterno. So in many ways, this verdict was not only about Graham Spanier, it was also about Paterno. Because during that era Graham Spanier was the second-most important person at Penn State."

Messages for the Paterno family and their lawyers were not returned Saturday. The Paterno estate is currently suing the NCAA, saying it damaged the Paterno estate's commercial interests by relying on conclusions about Paterno in the Freeh report.

Spanier is suing the school, claiming it violated an agreement made when he was pushed out as president after Sandusky was arrested by making public comments that were critical of him and not living up to promises it made. Penn State has countersued, saying he violated his employment agreement by not disclosing what he knew about Sandusky.

Spanier's conviction may not help his defamation lawsuit against Freeh that seeks damages for the reputational and economic harm he claims resulted from the report.

Freeh's office said Saturday he was traveling out of the country and unable to comment.

Even the conviction of Sandusky on 45 counts of child abuse, for which he's now five years into a 30- to 60-year sentence, remains pending in the courts. He was in a courtroom near the Penn State campus on Friday for a hearing.