

Baylor interim head quickly fires provost: Replacement to "bring people together"

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The interim president of Baylor University, Bill Underwood, quickly acted on his first day on the job, replacing provost David L. Jeffrey, who last fall had taken up Underwood's challenge to debate academic freedom during the Texas school's contentious effort to redefine itself.

Underwood, who became interim head of the Baptist campus on June 1, appointed Randall O'Brien, the religion department chairman, to replace Jeffrey, who had been in that post for exactly two years.

"I appreciate Dr. Jeffrey's contributions to Baylor, but at this particular point in our history," said Underwood, who had been a law professor on the Waco campus, "I thought what the university needed was a person with Dr. O'Brien's unique ability to bring people together."

Underwood succeeded Robert B. Sloan Jr., who stepped down to the role of chancellor after a long struggle over plans to make Baylor a leading educational institution by 2012.

Will Davis, who is chair of the Baylor regents, told the *Waco Tribune-Herald* that Jeffrey's firing probably surprised many regents and was done without consultation. "It's hard to see this as a healing event," said Davis, who nonetheless expressed support for Underwood.

As for Jeffrey, who will be returning to full-time teaching, he noted that O'Brien has "spoken movingly to the faculty and invited folks to move into that [healing] process," according to Associated Baptist Press.

Underwood, who called Jeffrey a friend, said he holds the Baylor 2012 campaign as a "statement of aspiration" and wants to "preserve the Christian character" of the

school and faculty.