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STUDENTS PROTEST AGAINST PORTLAND
RALLYING AT HUB, SOME CALL FOR COACH'S DISMISSAL AFTER REPORTED ANTI-LESBIAN REMARKS

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Article Text:
UNIVERSITY PARK -- Saying Penn State women's basketball coach Rene Portland must go, leaders of a student protest called on the university Tuesday to dismiss the coach and address the hate they say is prevalent on campus.

"There is no place for Rene Portland at Penn State. There's no place for hate at Penn State. If we have to have a rally every day to proclaim our intrinsic worth, we will have a rally every day to do so," yelled Darryl Watson, the Student Stonewall Coalition member who led the rally in the HUB-Robeson Center.

"Rene Portland cannot be here," he said. "I will not subsidize her bigotry and her hate, her discrimination any more."

Former Penn State student Jennifer Harris has accused Portland of forcing her off the basketball team because she was thought to be a lesbian. Portland denied the accusation, and the university has said it will investigate the matter.

Harris transferred to James Madison, and The National Center for Lesbian Rights brought the complaint to Penn State.

Penn State spokesman Bill Mahon said the university's anti-discrimination policy is evidence that the issue is important to the university.

"Until less than a week ago, this wasn't an issue," he said. "The former student never brought this to Penn State's attention. And because of a very solid anti-discrimination policy that, in fact, has been in place a lot longer than most institutions have had one and is stronger than what the federal and state government provide, I think it's some measure of how important this issue is to Penn State."

But students at Tuesday's protest thought the issue has been around for years. "(Jennifer) Harris is representative of a number of different students, and Rene Portland is just a symptom of a much larger problem," Watson said after the rally.

They pointed to Portland's comments in the past. In the mid-1980s, Portland reportedly told the Chicago Sun Times that she did not want lesbians on her team.

Gandarvaka Gray, president of the Penn State Black Caucus, asked how many more students will have to be subjected to Portland's hate before something is done.

"There is no place for homophobia at Penn State," she said.

"If that means there is no place for Rene Portland, then that is what it means, because there is no place for homophobia at Penn State," Gray said to applause.

In a statement released Friday, Portland denied the accusation. "This is completely and utterly untrue, and I will not let her allegations taint the success -- on and off the floor -- of Lady Lion basketball," Portland said.

She said she supports the university's nondiscrimination policy, including the part about sexual orientation. She also said Harris isn't on the team because of "performance and attitude in relation to basketball."

The National Center for Lesbian Rights issued a news re lease saying if the university doesn't retract Portland's statement by today, Harris will file a lawsuit..About 30 students participated in Tuesday's rally in the HUB-Robeson Center, while others watched from the sides.

Robey Patrick, a graduate student in Spanish literature, said he was at the protest to show support for all students on campus, in cluding those in minority groups.

"I'm also here because I think that it's embarrassing that the university tries to constantly save face, instead of actually putting forth a true face of re spectability in the community," he said.

Jen Treasone, a sophomore in business, and Elise Turner, a sophomore in marketing, didn't participate in the rally but were sympathetic. "They have a good message," Turner said.

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