

April 1, 2019 BOV

President's Remarks

Much has transpired since we last met on November 26th following Amazon's announcement that they will build HQ2 in Northern Virginia. The linked Tech-Talent Pipeline Initiative, an MOU between the Commonwealth and higher education, has now been recommended for funding in the form of a first installment that includes capital funds for the Virginia Tech Innovation Campus at National Landing, planning and construction funds for the Data and Decision Sciences Building in Blacksburg, along with a process for requesting the first allocations of funding for enrollment growth in Blacksburg and Northern Virginia.

With this unprecedented commitment from the state comes the expectation that we will perform. We are not taking that expectation lightly. Some 75 people have been working each and every day since November with our Delivery Team to build momentum and make the countless decisions, small and large, that will make this transformative investment a success for Virginia Tech, for higher education, and for the Commonwealth. We will spend the better part of the next decade building programs and facilities with partners, and the rest of the century realizing the impact of this investment on the people of Virginia, through a diversified technology-based economy - one that does not exacerbate the divides between wealthy and everyone else, between urban and rural, and between those who have the ability to navigate today's technology-enabled landscape and those who do not. So while we strive to propel this new age forward with science, technology, entrepreneurship, education and research, we do so through the lens of the human condition and how we improve the lives of everyone in our communities.

The Innovation Campus is a major step toward realizing the Binary Star vision for Virginia Tech, where the facilities and people of our institution leverage the duality of our urban and rural footprints through the fluid exchange of people, energy and ideas.

We do this through the statewide Commonwealth Cyber Initiative that we lead; through our deep partnership with Carilion Clinic based in the growing Virginia Tech Carilion Academic Health Center that addresses the most significant health issues of the people in Southwest Virginia and surrounding communities, and through the Virginia Agricultural Experiment Station and its presence in every community in the Commonwealth. By the way, kudos to those BOV members who participated in all or part of the 4-day bus trip to visit our ARECs!

I am also pleased to report that Virginia Tech is among the founding university members of the Greater Washington Partnership's Capital CoLAB initiative, chaired by Northrop Grumman Chairman, Wes Bush. In just a year, the CoLAB has worked directly with our universities and our faculty to create a set of Digital Tech Certificates that our universities can offer. The employer partners of the CoLAB have pledged to offer students graduating with these

certificates preferences for hiring and internships. This Fall, Virginia Tech will launch its Capital CoLAB-endorsed certificate that is tied to the new Data and Decisions Minor arising for the Destination Area in Data and Decisions. The minor and associated certificate will be available to students from all of our undergraduate programs. This minor will prepare our students who major in everything from computer science to rhetoric to agriculture with the digital skills that they need to develop resilient and exciting careers in the digitally-enabled world they are entering. This is the first of several such certificate programs that we will introduce over the coming years. The Capital CoLAB partnership ensures that these programs will be scalable and continually updated, forming a foundation for lifelong learning in the spirit of the VT-shaped student experience.

The CoLAB recognizes the imperative that the talent pool that we bring through our universities must become more inclusive of low- and middle-income students, students of color, veterans and first-generation students. Neither our economy nor our democratic society can advance without broadening access to higher education. This is urgent, and the CEOs of our students' employers are losing patience. I applaud the Commonwealth for offering the resources needed to freeze in-state undergraduate tuition and educational fees for the coming academic year. I applaud the BOV for accepting this offer. Affordability is critical to broadening access and enhancing student success. This move will help us accelerate the downward trend in debt of in-state students that began with last-year's Virginia Tech graduates.

Speaking of the well-being of our students, I'd like to thank the provost and our task force on mental health. The report is comprehensive and actionable. It will help us direct resources to where they are needed the most. This is the one problem most frequently cited by university leaders as among the biggest challenges we face.

Since November we have welcomed new leaders, including Cyril Clarke as the provost (who is no longer interim), and Dr. Lee Learman who will join us officially this summer as the dean of the VTC School of Medicine. Today, you approved the appointment of one new Alumni Distinguished Professor, Dr. Wing Ng of Mechanical Engineering, and three University Distinguished Professors, Dr. Daniel Crawford of Chemistry, Dr. Romesh Batra of Biomedical Engineering and Mechanics, and Dr. Roger Ekirch of History. Each is a celebrated scholar in his respective field, and we are fortunate to call them our colleagues at Virginia Tech.

On Friday I had three experiences that reminded me of the transformative power of student competition on the big stage. In the morning, I watched our students reassembling FutureHAUS on the Drillfield, the project that won top prize at the Solar Decathlon in Dubai, and that will be positioned on Times Square in May and at the site of our Innovation Campus later this year. FutureHAUS was constructed - and reconstructed after being destroyed by a fire - over two-and-a-half years by a multidisciplinary team of about 100 students from five colleges and ICAT. This project has the potential to redefine the future of housing and construction. Later that morning, I attended a major announcement at TORC Robotics, a company that was founded by Virginia Tech students after successful showings at the Intelligent Ground Vehicle Competition and the DARPA Grand Challenge in 2005. Daimler Trucks has acquired a majority

stake in this ground-breaking company that is helping to define the future of robotics and self-driving technology. TORC will grow dramatically in Blacksburg as a result. This is clearly the beginning of something big for our local economy. Finally, that night, we were treated to a third example of student teamwork on the global stage. Congratulations to Coach Buzz Williams and the men's basketball team for their best season ever.

Experiential learning under realistic conditions is a cornerstone of the VT-shaped learning environment that we aspire to create for all of our students under Beyond Boundaries. Before you can contribute to a winning team, you have to do your homework, and I've got a little for you. Each of you has received a copy of Joseph Aoun's book, "Robot-Proof – Higher Education in the Age of Artificial Intelligence." Dr. Aoun is president of Northeastern University, one of the leading institutions for experiential learning. I think you will enjoy his insights, and I look forward to discussing this future with you soon.

Thank you.