

**President's Open Session Remarks - 20Mar23 BOV**

Blacksburg is still buzzing from last night's win. Congratulations to our Hokies Women's basketball team for advancing to the Sweet Sixteen! Off to Seattle!

Since we last met, we have secured three ACC championships, Men's and Women's Indoor Track and Field, and Women's Basketball. This weekend, our Women's Swimming and Diving Team placed 20<sup>th</sup> at the NCAA Championships and Wrestling placed ninth, the highest finish for an ACC team. Whit's "Challenger to Champion" mantra is bearing fruit.

Also, since we last met, we have concluded successful searches for academic leaders, including Saonee Sarker, incoming dean of the Pamplin College of Business, and Lu Liu, incoming dean of the College of Architecture, Arts and Design. Thanks to Robin Russell and Rosemary Blieszner for their extraordinary service as interim deans. I'd also like to welcome Mark Sikes as our new Dean of Students.

Over the past few months and going forward this spring, the provost and I have been visiting the academic colleges to reflect on where we have been over the past five years and where we are headed. Many of the milestones outlined in our strategic plan have been met or exceeded. I summarized those achievements in my message to you in November. We are a stronger university than we were five years ago, despite the pandemic. We have shared our two primary aspirations going forward, to become a top-100 global university, and to make Virginia Tech accessible and affordable for those who may have struggled in the past to attend Virginia Tech and to have the full Hokie experience while a student.

Demand for a Virginia Tech degree has never been stronger, but our infrastructure has limited our undergraduate population to 30,000 over the past four years. That enrollment cap has made Virginia Tech more selective than ever as well, meaning that many qualified students who we know would be successful are not able to attend, at least as first-year students. Some may say that this is a good problem to have, especially in a day when many of our peer institutions are struggling with enrollment. This is a challenge that is poised to worsen, as the size of the entering class is presently limited by on-campus housing capacity. That capacity (and ultimately our total undergraduate enrollment) will decrease with

time as older residence halls are taken offline, unless new housing is built. I'd like to thank the Board for voting to include the first phase of the SLV in the six-year capital outlay plan. This is not authorization to design or build, but it gives us hope that we will find a way to at least hold our ground on access and enrollment.

The affordability focus has three components. The first is keeping tuition and fee rates as low as possible in the face of high inflation. Over the past five years, CPI inflation has increased 21 % while tuition and fee rates for in-state students have risen 9%, and last year's 3% increase was returned in the form of tuition scholarships. Our Funds for the Future program ensures that students from families making less than \$100,000 are protected from tuition increases for four years. Budget reallocations, increased philanthropy and increased support from the state have all helped to keep tuition decreasing in real inflation-adjusted dollars. We are waiting to hear about our budget in Richmond, so we did not take action on tuition and fees at this meeting. Should the General Assembly not take further action, we will be left with the "skinny budget" which does not include sufficient inflationary increases to avoid a significant budget shortfall. We are hopeful that we will hear good news before we have to set tuition and fee rates for the upcoming academic year. Stay tuned.

The second component is financial aid. Virginia Tech's fees are the lowest in the Commonwealth, and our tuition rates are well below the other selective public universities, UVA and W&M – yet these rates are still unaffordable for low- and middle-income Virginia families. Historically, Virginia Tech has discounted tuition at very low levels compared to peers. We aim to change that. Last fall, the board committed to eliminating the net price gap between Virginia Tech and peers for low-and middle-income students from Virginia. In October, we launched an Access and Affordability Initiative led by Menah Pratt and Matt Holt. The initial work by Menah, Matt and the associated committees has led to the conclusion that this first phase will require about \$30M in new investments in need-based financial aid per year. Sources for these funds will include philanthropy, internal reallocation, state and federal government support, and paid internships provided by our employer partners. A detailed plan is under construction. This will make a difference for thousands of students over the coming years, representing a recommitment to this important dimension of our land-grant mission.

The third component is the Hokie experience. Opportunity costs for students without adequate financial means or family support may prevent these Hokies from engaging in the out-of-class experiences that build skills, expand networks and lead ultimately to more and better career choices. We have to address this gap.

Although much of the focus for the Access and Affordability Initiative is on undergraduates, we recognize that graduate students have also been under financial pressure. The Graduate Student Assistantship Support Task Force commissioned by provost Clarke and dean Surprenant and led by associate dean Trish Hammer provided a report in February outlining the challenge along with a series of recommendations. If we are to become a top-100 Global university, we need to be supporting our graduate student assistants at a level that is competitive with peers, and that allows them to support the mission of the university without distraction from food and shelter insecurity. We look forward to updating the Board in June as our budget situation becomes clearer.

Speaking of our top-100 global aspiration, we are making great progress in our research frontiers.

Last week, FBRI Executive Director and VP Mike Friedlander and health care executive Heywood Fralin were awarded the Gordon and Llura Gund Leadership Award from Research!America for their advocacy for medical and health research.

Tomorrow, we will be hosting President Masisi of Botswana in Blacksburg to discuss the future of our partnership in One Health and conservation. Lavery Professor of Wildlife Conservation, Kathleen Alexander, has been building this program over the last three decades. In addition to advancing our understanding of zoonotic diseases at the boundaries where human and wildlife populations interact, Kathy has created unique experiential learning opportunities for graduate students, fellow faculty, and high school students.

Staying Global, provost Clarke recently led a delegation with VP Ghosh to India where we announced the opening of the VT India Centre at IIT Madras. IIT-Madras is widely regarded as the top engineering college in India.

These global partnerships lay the foundation for bringing top talent and partners to the Commonwealth. Also important in establishing Virginia Tech as a leading research institution are the achievements of our faculty as recognized nationally and globally. In the five months since we last met, there have been many such awards. Let me mention just a few:

- Bevlee Watford was named to the National Science Board, the first Hokie to serve on the NSB since T. Marshall Hahn
- Linsey Marr named to National Academy of Engineering
- M.A. Saghai Maroof named fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science
- Rafael Davalos and Roe-Hoan Yoon were named Fellows of the National Academy of Inventors, and Robert Gourdie, s senior member of NAI
- Menah Pratt and Robert Weiss have been named Fellows of the American Council on Education (ACE)

And at the program level, US News and World Report ranked Virginia Tech as #4 of the best global universities for electrical and electronic engineering in the US, behind only Princeton, Georgia Tech and MIT.

Electrical and Computer Engineering (ECE) that supports our Innovation Campus program. In mentioning the Innovation Campus, I'd like to address concerns I have heard about Amazon's recent decision to pause on the second phase of construction for HQ2 in Arlington. Their HQ2 hiring remains robust (although they have announced workforce reductions elsewhere), but utilization of office space has changed since the pandemic. There is no immediate impact of Amazon's decision on the Innovation Campus other than the likely slowdown in construction in the National Landing neighborhood. It is also important to note that our MOU with the Commonwealth is separate from the MOU between Amazon and the Commonwealth. The need for tech talent goes well beyond one company or sector.

The larger issue of layoffs in the tech sector is not necessarily a bad thing for the Innovation Campus. The companies that are announcing layoffs are largely right-sizing after a pandemic boom. Demand for tech talent continues to be strong across all sectors. For Fall 2023, we already have more than 1,000 applications for our MEng programs at the Innovation Campus. Our focus on creating pathways

from other disciplines into technology fields should allow our programs to be resilient to shifts in the economy.

While I remain incredibly optimistic about Virginia Tech's future, I recognize that we are in uncertain times. The combination of high inflation, global unrest, concerns for our banking system, ever more powerful AI and intense culture wars require that we remain nimble, focus on priorities, and stick to our guiding principles. It's always a great time to be a Hokie, but I feel like the more challenging our environment, the higher we fly.