

## President's Open Session Remarks to Full BOV on November 18, 2025

Since we last met in person in August, Virginia Tech has nearly completed a semester. It has been a good one, with momentum maintained or building on many fronts despite the headwinds. In some areas such as international enrollment, research awards, and state appropriations, we have challenges that will likely persist through the next few fiscal years. Despite those issues, I remain optimistic about our ability to emerge as a stronger university than we are today. We are very well aligned with emerging opportunities.

I have been on the road for the last month speaking in many venues about the importance of the engaged university in an era of dwindling faith in higher education. Public land-grant research universities are the model for the coming decade. Deep partnerships and community engagement are the antidote to public doubt in higher education, and a university that is so deeply rooted in service is the pinnacle of that class. We are Virginia Tech, and many of our peers aspire to be Virginia Tech.

We are calling our model for the modern engaged university the **Virginia Tech Innovation Network**. We are embedded with all three mission areas in the communities we serve, thematically aligned with the needs of those communities. Our Agricultural Research and Extension Centers have been performing as nodes within this model for over 100 years. Our sites in Roanoke, Alexandria, Arlington, Newport News, and Riva San Vitale are examples of more recent nodes in the network. As we activate the Virginia Tech Innovation Network, we are taking this modern model for an engaged university to another level. It is not going to be easy to realize the promise of a network that is much greater than the sum of its nodes, but that must be our focus. I want to thank Julie Ross for leading the Northern Virginia Steering Committee over the past two years. That committee laid the groundwork for connecting the northern Virginia nodes of the network and all of those nodes back to the hub in Blacksburg.

As you have heard, Julie will be our next provost. We could not have a better successor for Cyril Clarke. Cyril, thank you for leading our academic enterprise with such grace, wisdom and resolve over the past eight years. As you re-join the faculty, I am pleased that you are willing to devote a portion of your effort to advising me and our next provost on the implementation of the vision for the Virginia Tech Innovation Network.

In my recent travels, I have been involved in multiple discussions around two topics – AI and Athletics. On the former topic, everyone in higher ed and the business community understands that AI will transform almost everything we do. Students and employees are worried about falling behind or becoming irrelevant. Faculty are looking for ways to adapt the learning environment to AI. Everyone has a sense of both dread and excitement over

this inevitable transformation. It is essential that we shift learning beyond simply what is possible with AI to thinking more broadly about how we apply an ethical lens or perform a critical evaluation of an AI-generated result. Regardless, it is clear that AI is best utilized as augmentation to human intelligence and creativity. Alongside depth in a discipline, developing durable skills such as teamwork, leadership, time management, communication, and critical thinking, becomes more important than ever. This is the driver behind our focus on Bridge Experiences, including internships, undergraduate research, study abroad, student organizations and competitions. It also highlights the importance of living learning programs such as Innovate, Mozaiko, Securitas, Studio 72 and many others, including the Corps of Cadets. Virginia Tech was ranked this fall in the top 25 by US News in Learning Communities among five public land-grant universities along with Michigan State, Purdue, Maryland, and Wisconsin.

Along with AI, durable skills, and the Innovation Network, the other recurrent theme in my national engagements over the last several weeks is, unsurprisingly, athletics. In the new world of revenue sharing, there are very few institutions, if any, that can operate a competitive athletics program without institutional subsidies or fees. So why do we invest? At Virginia Tech, there are four primary drivers for investment:

- 1) The student-athlete experience is a leadership training ground
- 2) The experiences shared during major athletic events create indelible ties between students, alumni and the institution that seed future engagement and giving
- 3) Athletics at the highest level elevates Virginia Tech's brand beyond Appalachia and the mid-Atlantic
- 4) Our local economy is critically dependent on Athletics

We are making very good progress since the September vote to increase the Athletics budget by \$229M over four years. The Athletics Investment Oversight Committee is up and running, chaired by COO Sebring with BOV representation by Ted Hansen. The AIOC will chart a path to a sustainable budget in 2029. They are also reviewing various proposals in the private equity, private capital space to ensure that we are staying up to speed on the rapid evolution of these strategies in service to decision-making by the administration and the BOV.

And I could not be more pleased with the announcement yesterday that James Franklin and his family are becoming Hokies! Coach Franklin would not have joined us without our recent commitment to Invest to Win. I'd especially like to thank the search committee, including BOV members J Pearson and Ryan McCarthy, who with the support of AD Whit Babcock, Rector John Rocovich and University Legal Counsel, Kay Heidbreder, led us to this outcome. I'd also like to thank search committee members Bruce Arians, Bridget Ryan

Berman, Lynne Doughtie, Bud Foster, Brad Hobbs, and Eddie Royal. This was an all-star committee, and each of them invested their time, expertise and energy to ensure that Hokies football is positioned to win in this new era of college sports.

I'd like to finish with an update on the presidential priorities, Virginia Tech Advantage and Global Distinction. You saw in the presentation by Menah Pratt that the Virginia Tech Advantage is already having an impact. We are ahead of pace toward our \$500M philanthropic goal with over \$100M raised in the first two years. The average net price for VTA students has dropped nearly \$2000 over the last year. We will see the impact of the lowered net price and the additional career coaching over the coming years in the outcomes for our VTA graduates.

On the research front, extramural expenditures have reached \$482M, a 50% increase over the last four fiscal years. Total expenditures eclipsed \$700M for the first time in FY25. And we have had a big month for our global reputation, winning the APLU International Impact award last week and hosting this week's Times Higher Education Innovation and Impact Summit at Academic Building One. This is the first time this global summit will be held in North America. The Summit's theme is "Securing Tomorrow: Partnerships and Technology for a resilient future," so you can see why Virginia Tech was chosen.

As I wrap up, I wish you all a restful holiday season. We all need a break more than ever after an extraordinarily busy fall so we can be rested and ready to innovate in January.

Go Hokies!