

President's Open Session Remarks – June 7, 2022 - BOV

Since we last met in early April, we reveled in the commencement of over 6,000 Hokies; we celebrated our Sesquicentennial in Blacksburg with the announcement that we are raising the target of the Boundless Impact campaign from \$1.5B to \$1.872B; and we returned with the full force of April weekend community events that engage thousands of Hokies, including the Run in Remembrance, the Spring Game, the Big Event and Relay for Life. Along with the conditions that allowed us to move to mask-optional in instructional settings, the ability to gather in large numbers to share experiences went a long way toward restoring a sense of well-being for most in our community. We are cognizant of the reality that the pandemic will probably be with us in some form or another for many months ahead, but we now have the tools and the experience to deal with the necessary balance of health safety and performing our tripartite mission effectively.

Since our last Board meeting, we also watched our softball team complete a historic season, hosting the NCAA Regionals and Super-regionals for the first time, and winning the Regionals; and of course, our baseball team is having its best year since we joined the ACC, having hosted and won the Regionals, with the Super-regionals coming up later this week. As a resident of campus, having this success on our diamonds has changed the feel of post-commencement Blacksburg. The month after Commencement used to be a good time to get away. Now Blacksburg is the place to be.

I would like to highlight a few recent events and achievements that deserve a bit more attention. First of all, we are in the final leg of the approval of a historic budget for public higher education in Virginia. Almost all our priorities going into this cycle have been included in the budget that is pending approval by the governor and final approval by the General Assembly on June 17. I like to think of Virginia Tech as the “Peoples’ University of Virginia.” Our reach extends across the commonwealth. We are the most comprehensive state university, and the largest in terms of FTE enrollment and student credit hours. The biennium budget reflects that status. Pending final approval, we will receive an additional \$15.3M in each of the two years of the biennium for access, affordability, and quality enhancement.

It is worth noting that state support per resident student in nominal dollars is almost back to the 2000-01 level. While this is a milestone to celebrate, it is important for perspective that this represents a 46% decrease in inflation-adjusted real dollars per student. Nevertheless, the inflation-adjusted appropriation per student has been improving since FY21.

In parallel, the fund split in the University Division has been improving since FY19, now slightly above 25% state support with the remaining 75% coming from tuition and other revenue. To put the 25% in context, state support was above 50% at the turn of the Century. But if you had asked my opinion in FY19 of where we would be in FY23, I would have said we would be below 20% in state support – so we will take 25% as significant progress.

We appreciate the trust that the General Assembly has placed in Virginia Tech, and we are delivering on that trust. I'd also like to thank the business community, especially the Virginia Business Higher Education Council under the leadership of Don Finley, and the board chairmanship of former VT rector, Dennis Treacy. We just announced that former Speaker of the House, Kirk Cox, will be taking over for Don Finley upon his retirement. Thank you, Don, for 25 years of outstanding leadership of VBHEC.

In addition to operating funding, the biennial budget includes support for a critical capital project, the replacement of Randolph Hall with Mitchell Hall. This is the biggest academic building project on the Blacksburg campus in Virginia Tech history, and essential for the continued growth and elevation of the College of Engineering.

There are many other elements of the budget to celebrate, including financial aid, investments in research and commercialization, a 5% salary plan for each year of the biennium, and continued growth in support for Cooperative Extension and our Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets. Thank you to Chris Yianilos and Elizabeth Hooper for leading the charge in Richmond!

Now to the national level: We won several team national championships this year. Just in the last few weeks, our club softball team won their first National Championship. In April, our Men's Running club won the National Championship. Men's Rugby won the National Championship as a club sport in December. Baseball won the club National Championship last June. Stretching beyond athletics, our soil judging team is best in the nation, as is our Real Estate team, which took first place in the national Mulroy Real Estate Challenge. So as Whit Babcock and our NCAA athletics program steadily builds from a Challenger Brand to a Champion Brand, our competing student teams in other arenas are following suit.

Virginia Tech is also distinguishing itself at the global level. One of the overarching objectives in our strategic plan is elevating Virginia Tech to top-100 status in the global rankings. This is an important objective for attracting the world's top talent, and bringing that talent, partners, and resources to the Commonwealth of Virginia, which we serve. To compare apples to apples, and so as not to deviate from our land-grant mission, we compare ourselves to other U.S. public land-grant research universities in the global rankings, with an emphasis on the Times Higher Education rankings. We are currently #16 with the milestone objective of top-13 by 2024.

Two years ago, Times Higher Education introduced a new ranking system called the Impact Rankings. This system assesses universities against the U.N.'s 17 Sustainable Development Goals. This spring, Virginia Tech was ranked #98 of 1,406 universities in 106 countries. We are tied for fifth in the U.S., and we are third among our land-grant peer group, behind Penn State and Michigan State. Virginia Tech is a leader in Responsible Consumption and Production, Sustainable Cities and Communities, Zero Hunger and Global Partnerships. The Impact rankings are the first to fully recognize the role of land-grant universities at a global level. So, while we focus on enhancing our impact on the traditional axes by which research universities have been valued in the past, the THE Impact rankings reflect the impact we are already having on axes

that I believe will be highly valued in the future. By “valued,” I mean top talent and global partners will come our way because we lead in impact.

I’d also like to share some good news about the civic engagement of Hokies. You may be surprised to learn that 90% of our eligible students are registered to vote, and 73% voted in the 2020 election, compared to 48% in 2012. This did not happen by accident. In 2018, we launched a Civic Engagement program and the Hokies Vote Caucus. This past spring, we began the Deliberative Dialogues Forum, and a Citizen Democracy Leadership program will begin in the fall. Assistant Director of Leadership and Civic Engagement, Jes Davis, along with student Maya Mahdi have played important leadership roles in not only encouraging Hokies to register and vote, but in promoting the importance of civic engagement to our democracy. Our 73% voting rate is among the highest in the Commonwealth, and eight percentage points above the national average. And this was achieved despite the vociferous objections of some non-student residents in Montgomery County, who do not think Virginia Tech students should have the right to vote where they live. In this divisive national landscape where speech is suppressed and conversation is limited, it is wonderful to see Hokies taking the lead in having difficult conversations across differences and exercising their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Sometimes, I think college-aged students may be the only adults in the room, so to speak.

Finally, I would like to thank those among our Board of Visitors who are completing a term: Mehul Sanghani (second term), Horacio Valeiras (second term), Ed Baine, Preston White, Phil Miskovic, and Paolo Fermin. And farewell to Frank Shushok, the next president of Roanoke College!

Mehul, in your eight years on the Board, you have shared your experiences as a native of Blacksburg, an entrepreneur and a successful CEO of a rapidly growing tech company. Your passions for athletics, solving the problem of food insecurity, and advancing artificial intelligence and data analytics have led us to new heights. Thank you, and Hema as well.

Horacio, you have brought to Virginia Tech and the Virginia Tech Foundation your expertise in Finance, your deep understanding of board governance, and your passion for free speech. We have benefitted from your active engagement for over a decade. I especially appreciate your mentorship and guidance during your period as rector, and Laura and I have both enjoyed our friendship with you and Amy.

Ed, you are completing one term on the Board. Your expertise in finance, in running large diverse organizations, and your thoughtful and deliberate leadership style has been a tremendous asset to the university, and to me personally. Thank you!

Preston, your passion for all things Virginia Tech is unmatched. I especially appreciate your ability to bring people together around important causes. You have a future in University Advancement should you ever want to do that full time! As a former rector at another Virginia university, CNU, you have a deep understanding of higher education in Virginia, and we have all benefitted from your experience and perspective.

Phil and Paolo, thank you for so effectively representing your constituencies this past year. With the challenges of emerging from the pandemic, our active efforts to end sexual assault, and the work on transforming shared governance, you have all had a busy year. Your efforts will be felt by the staff, graduate students, and undergraduates for many years to come.

Frank, you have truly defined what it means to be an empathetic, thoughtful, and engaging VP for student affairs. Your national leadership on issues that are important to students and their families has impacted all institutions of higher education in this country and beyond. We have been lucky to be your home base. I'm pleased for you and Roanoke College as you begin as president, and we are all fortunate that you will remain nearby. Good luck to you and Kelly!