

President's Open Session BOV Meeting Remarks

April 14, 2026

As you heard yesterday from Provost Ross, we were very pleased to learn at the end of March that SURATech, a partnership of the Southeastern Universities Research Association (SURA) and Virginia Tech won the Department of Energy competition for the Management and Operations contract for Jefferson Lab. This is a momentous opportunity and responsibility for Virginia Tech. Jefferson Lab is the world's premier Nuclear Physics user facility. Its charter is expanding to include the DOE's High Performance Data Facility (HPDF), a key element of the Federal Government's GENESIS project that will advance our country's ability to lead in the AI-enabled future.

Other universities that are partners in the M&O contracts for DOE Basic Energy Science labs include the University of Chicago, the University of California, Stanford University, Princeton University, Stony Brook University, Iowa State University and the University of Tennessee. We are joining good company.

I would like to thank Kevin Pitts, Laurel Minor and Dan Sui for spearheading Virginia Tech's active engagement in SURATech and the Lab. Without them, this opportunity to build the latest node in the Virginia Tech Innovation Network would not have been possible.

We have received several other big awards and contracts since we last met. I hope you have been following along in VTNews. That said, awards are down in number and value this year across the nation due to a slowdown during the beginning of 2025 as the agencies were restructured and staffing was downsized. As you heard from Chief Operating Officer, Amy Sebring, we are tracking and modeling the impact on our research enterprise and the people who power it, including graduate students. I am hopeful that we will see some recovery soon. We are thankful to Congress for inserting language in the FY26 appropriations bills that protected our partial recovery of costs for Facilities and Administration. As shared by Vice President Chris Yianilos, we anticipate that Congress will do the same for FY27, but the threat is not over.

On Athletics, we continue to make good progress. The Athletics Investment Oversight Committee under the leadership of Amy Sebring is bringing transparency and alignment to the investment of funds to support Athletics. BOV member Ted Hanson has chaired the Future State subcommittee. We will have more to report soon. Please expect a full briefing and recommendations at the June meeting.

The biggest topic in higher education and at Virginia Tech has been AI and its impact on our tripartite mission of education, research and outreach. Menah Pratt and her team in Strategic Affairs has been convening stakeholder groups – more than 50 of them so far –

and the conversation inevitably turns to AI. Our community is asking urgently for guidance and direction, but at the same time, they are innovating at the individual, department and college levels. The President's Council retreat in March dealt with our AI Future. As with another fast-moving field – Athletics – we are convening a Future State workgroup which will bring our horizon back from 25 years out to 3-4 years out. Some elements of that future are already becoming clear:

- 1) Researchers who utilize AI as an imperfect but supremely knowledgeable collaborator will vault ahead of everyone else. The gap will grow quickly.
- 2) Our students must become adept at using AI, but especially in verifying the results and applying an ethical lens to the use of AI.
- 3) The university must prioritize provision of resources (tools, compute power, release time, and cohort learning environments).
- 4) All of us need to ask hard questions about the role of faculty and administrators in a learning environment that emphasizes durable skills over information transfer.
- 5) Rapid curricular changes are needed to adapt to a generational change in career opportunities for our graduates.

Buckle up!

Finally, it has been the privilege of a lifetime to help steward Virginia Tech over the past 12 years. Thank you for your partnership. I've worked closely with (and worn out) eight rectors in my time! The capacity and dedication of the volunteer trustees on our BOV over the years has been inspirational. I look forward to thanking in person the many people who have supported me in this work during my time as president. For now, I am committed to supporting the university and the new president through the upcoming transition. In the meantime, there is plenty of work to do.

Go Hokies!