

President's Open Session Remarks – June 2, 2026 BOV Meeting

Although we are only seven weeks from our last meeting, much has changed in that time. First and most importantly, we celebrated the graduation of another 8,600 Hokies this spring. 275 Hokies graduated from the Corps of Cadets and nearly 170 were commissioned as officers in the armed forces. Hokie Athletics had a strong showing this spring with three teams sports competing in the NCAA championships: baseball, softball and women's golf. In addition, at least 10 Hokie track and field athletes have already qualified for the NCAA finals in Eugene, Oregon later this month.

Hokie Athletics is going through a metamorphosis, starting with the *Invest to Win* funding plan you approved in September of last year, which was rapidly followed by the hiring of James Franklin. The next big milestone is your approval today of the affiliation agreement with Hokie Ventures, an entity that will provide Virginia Tech with the flexibility we need to compete regardless of the structural changes that come our way in the future. I'd like to thank Ted Hanson for leading the Future State Subcommittee of the Athletics Investment Oversight Committee for guiding us to this new beginning. Other members include Amy Sebring, Kay Heidbreder, Simon Allen, Brandon Hall, and Whit Babcock.

I'd especially like to thank Whit for his twelve and a half years of service leading Virginia Tech Athletics. If it were not for Whit's advocacy, persistence and vision, we would not be in position to thrive in this new era of college athletics. We still have many challenges ahead of course, but we are facing forward and moving faster than ever.

Lynne Doughtie is chairing the search for our next VP and Director of Athletics. Board members, Mehul Sanghani and J. Pearson are members of the search committee. We are aiming to complete the search this summer.

Yesterday, we formally began our role in partnership with SURA to manage and operate Jefferson Labs in Newport News. We are looking forward to the groundbreaking ceremony for the DOE High Performance Data Facility.

Last month, I appointed the AI Futures Working Group to lead in the formulation of our institutional strategy around AI. Our incoming engineering dean, Warren Dixon, and Professor of Practice Rishi Jaitly, are co-leading the Working Group. I am expecting their initial recommendations this summer with a broader set this fall. In the meantime, our faculty, students and staff have been leading at the college, program and VP area level. I am most excited about the new AI minor led out of Computer Science that will be open to every undergraduate student. The 18-credit minor begins with core courses in "demystification of AI" by Computer Science and concludes with application courses offered by five colleges.

There is no question that AI is upsetting the status quo for students, faculty, employers, and society as a whole, but there is opportunity to lead, and who better situated than Virginia Tech graduates to show the way? Our commitment to hands-on learning in service to our communities positions us well to lead in verification, ethics, and the development of durable skills that are best learned in authentic environments. It is these durable skills including teamwork, speaking and writing, ethics and critical thinking that are becoming essential human differentiators in the age of AI.

Although there are many reasons to be optimistic about our future, there are numerous challenges confronting higher education at what seems like a historic nexus. Unlike March 2020 as we entered the pandemic uncertain of what would come next, we have a pretty good idea of what we are up against now. The demographic cliff, the federal government's impoundment of research funding, and state budget uncertainty are among the most vexing challenges already in play. After a decade of growth of Virginia Tech, sometimes rapid, we are likely going to see a period of dynamic stagnation while we resort our priorities to align with the shifting landscape. As you heard from COO Sebring and provost Ross, we are engaging in strategic reallocations that will allow us to continue to invest in our priorities while accommodating a constrained revenue scenario. These reallocations are both budgetary and effort focused, meaning that some changes will free up base resources immediately, and others redirect faculty, staff and student effort that will ultimately enhance outcomes for everyone.

In this way, Athletics is the forebearer. I expect we will need to reinvent ourselves in almost every other dimension over the coming years to ensure that we continue to serve the Commonwealth of Virginia at the highest level possible.

Finally, I'd like to comment on leadership. After a period of highly unusual stability, we are entering a period of rapid change in positions of leadership, both on the board and in the administration. Change creates uncertainty and concern for the future. That is understandable. But what we have built together is not dependent on any one individual or even a few individuals. Virginia Tech has staying power that will see us through rough spots and allow us to pounce on emerging opportunities with new energy and perspectives. I am incredibly proud of the team we have built. The membership of our President's Council – deans, VPs, institute directors – has never been better. I believe they are the best in higher education right now. The next president will inherit a highly functional leadership team that is capable of running the show through anything. This strength comes from expertise, integrity and our commitment to *Ut Prosim* through servant leadership among those in the administration, you as BOV members, alumni, students, faculty and staff. In my time remaining in this role, I look forward to working with the board to ensure that Virginia Tech

does not skip a beat, and in fact, becomes even better as we continue to build on a foundation that has never been stronger.

Go Hokies!