

FACULTY SENATE COMMUNICATIONS REPORT | 17 March 2016 meeting

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OVERVIEW

The 2015-16 Faculty Senate held its thirteenth regular meeting on 17 March 2016, from 3:45 to approximately 5:40 pm in the Riggle Room of ADUC. This meeting was focused on the passage of two resolutions, one representing a joint action with Staff Congress and the other being a Senate position statement, started at the previous 10 March special meeting, on the furloughs (and non-recurring salary reductions). The full text of both resolutions is available on the Faculty Senate Blackboard shell. The Provost was in attendance, but did not deliver a formal report.

JOINT BUDGET RESOLUTION WITH STAFF CONGRESS

At the behest of Chair Adams, the Senate considered a joint resolution with Staff Congress on the current budget crisis. Staff Congress had just recently passed a resolution, addressed specifically to House Speaker Greg Stumbo and Senate President Robert Stivers, calling on the General Assembly to reject Governor Bevin's proposed cuts to higher education funding. The resolution included some statements regarding the magnitude of the cuts and how they would adversely affect university operations. There was some debate on the Senate floor about one specific point in the Staff Congress resolution, namely the assertion that Bevin's cuts, on top of the cuts that have been experienced over the past several years (since 2008), would represent "a 35 percent inflation-adjusted reduction in state higher education funding." Through the magic of Google, Senator Tim Hare was able to verify the general accuracy of this statement, clarifying that the percent reduction seems to be an aggregate value for the entire state during the period beginning in 2008.

Aside from that, the only other point of discussion was whether to pass a new, slightly revised version of the resolution, and then ask Staff Congress to concur with it, or to approve the exact same resolution, adding "Faculty Senate" alongside "Staff Congress." It was ultimately decided to take the latter approach, with the Senate voting to approve the Staff Congress resolution, adding Faculty Senate where appropriate, and to re-send the resolution to Frankfort. The approved resolution is available on the Faculty Senate Blackboard shell. Senator Bev McCormick additionally motioned that all Senators present sign a piece of paper to be sent along with the resolution, a move that was approved and executed.

NOW, ABOUT THOSE FURLOUGHES

Previously on: As mentioned in the report for the 10 March special meeting, the Senate began work on a resolution expressing its position on the proposed furloughs. The Executive Council (EC) worked on the language somewhat, and brought the resolution back to the floor at 17 March meeting. The major adjustments made by the EC were to modify "furloughs" to "furloughs/non-recurring salary reductions," in light of the President's most recent missive on the subject, and to change the "cut-off" language to reflect the poverty line in Kentucky (\$24,300 yearly income).

Progressive system: The aforementioned language stating a "cut-off" line for who should be included in the furloughs/non-recurring salary reductions was subjected to a great deal of debate. Concern was expressed that Senate would be giving the administration ammunition by expressing any specific sentiments about how the furloughs/non-recurring salary reductions should be implemented. Additional concern was expressed that instituting a cut-off line would ultimately shift more financial burden onto everyone above the line. Essentially, this particular concern boils down to a question of whether the university should adopt a progressive system, wherein those who earn more shoulder proportionally more of the budget-related burden, or an equal system, wherein everyone loses precisely the same percentage. Ultimately, it was decided (by vote of the Senate) to strike the entire paragraph on how the pay cuts should be implemented, and the final resolution includes no such language.

Faculty inequity: It was noted that, however implemented in terms of percentages, faculty will suffer the peculiar fate of having their salary reduced without any concurrent reduction in actual work performed. Particularly in light of the revised plan, wherein faculty will not be "furloughed" but will rather suffer a one-time "non-recurring salary reduction" equivalent to five days' pay, it seems that faculty will be disproportionately disadvantaged. Indeed, the final resolution includes language stating that faculty (i.e., those receiving the non-recurring salary reduction) will lose salary but have no reduction in contract days worked, while furloughed employees will lose salary and also have a corresponding reduction in days worked.

On a related note, it turns out that the faculty's share of money can be recovered in the next fiscal year thanks to Governor Bevin generously allowing for the current-year 4.5% cut to be repaid to the state over an extended timeframe. Once again,

though, it bears repeating that the current-year 4.5% cut has not yet been instituted. In addition, the General Assembly has not yet finished its end of the budgeting process; as of the 17 March Senate meeting, the only official news from the legislature was the House version of the budget, which restored all of the higher education funding proposed for cutting by Governor Bevin. The President has said that he will “consider” returning lost pay to employees if the Governor’s higher education cuts are not ultimately enacted. Meanwhile, CFO Beth Patrick has apparently said that the furloughs/non-recurring salary reductions are not necessarily aimed only at addressing cuts in state appropriations, but may also provide additional help in addressing the internal tuition shortfall.

Due diligence: In light of the revision to the furlough plan, which included, among other things, a complete repudiation of faculty furloughs, there was general sentiment that the Senate should address the apparent failure of the administration to carry out full due diligence. Although it was asked whether we can know for sure that there was such a failure, the retraction of the faculty furloughs is strongly indicative of some, at least potential, problem in their execution. The Provost was asked directly about this issue, and his response was that it seemed unclear as to whether faculty could actually be furloughed, hence a decision to err on the side of caution and retract.

During discussion on this point, it was mentioned that staff and administration will receive five days of paid vacation under the revised plan, likely costing in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, given the decision to postpone their furlough days but keep the university closed during the week of 21-25 March. It seems that staff previously had spring break off, as a week of paid vacation, but it was decided to convert it into a work week fairly recently. According to Senator Ron Morrison, who was Faculty Regent at the time, the President himself argued that having spring break as a week of paid vacation amounts to a tremendous loss of productivity. It has also been stated that spring break is a valuable week for student recruitment; as a consequence, the question of whether this year’s complete university closure will adversely affect next year’s enrollment was raised.

The product of this discussion was the inclusion of language alluding to a clear failure to exercise due diligence on the furlough issue. The final resolution also calls on the administration to subject any future proposed budget solutions to the proper due diligence.

IT help wanted: There was some further discussion of the five IT positions presently posted as open on the MSU employment opportunities page. Apparently, at least according to CFO Patrick, those are not “real” positions; rather, the university is “testing the waters” to determine if any qualified applicants willing to work in Morehead can be found. According to the Provost, there is a need for the work that would be done by such individuals, but there is also a question of whether the right people can be hired directly or if the university should outsource the work to an outside contractor.

On a related note, the Provost provided a brief update on searches in Academic Affairs. The Deans were all asked to prioritize their ongoing searches, and all “first-tier” hires (those deemed most important) have been approved to proceed. The Provost is now looking at any searches in the “second-tier” and evaluating whether any of those should also be approved. He also stated that a search is on to replace Roslyn Perry, the recently departed Registrar.

Miscellaneous: Tenure and promotion will still be approved by the Board of Regents; the budget crisis will not have any effect on that process. Also, the faculty salary reductions will not apply to any new hires starting work in the fall.

Ultimate outcome: The Senate approved a final resolution, available in full on the Blackboard shell, which categorically states its opposition to the furloughs/non-recurring salary reductions as a viable solution to the current budget crisis. As mentioned in the preceding sections, the resolution also lays out the various inequities in the present plan for implementing the furloughs/non-recurring salary reductions, and clearly states the importance of proper due diligence as the university works through the crisis.

After passage of the resolution, Senator McCormick motioned that the Senate publicize the resolution by releasing it to the press. There was some debate on this point, with opposition mainly focused on concern that it might amount to bad publicity, especially given Governor Bevin’s general sentiments on the mismanagement of higher education. Although the Senate voted narrowly in favor of the motion, it was later found that university policy (specifically UAR 700.001) expressly prohibits any official statements aside from those made by the President or a designated media spokesperson.