

**,MINUTES  
STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF FLORIDA  
BOARD OF GOVERNORS  
Florida State University  
January 29, 2026  
Full Board**

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**Chair Levine:**

I'm going to go ahead and call the full Board of Governors meeting to order. Amanda, will you please call the roll?

**Amanda Gay:**

Chair Levine?

**Chair Levine**

Here.

**Amanda Gay:**

Vice Chair Cerio?

**Timothy Cerio:**

Here.

**Amanda Gay:**

Governor Bell-Barnett?

**Ashley Bell-Barnett:**

Here.

**Amanda Gay:**

Governor Broxson?

**Douglas Broxson:**

Here.

**Amanda Gay:**

Governor Dale?

**Carson Dale:**

Here

**Amanda Gay:**

Governor Dunn? I see Governor Dunn there. Governor Edge?

**Aubrey Edge:**

Here.

**Amanda Gay:**

Governor Good, Governor Haddock?

**Edward Haddock:**

Here.

**Amanda Gay:**

Governor Jones?

**Ken Jones:**

Here.

**Amanda Gay:**

Governor Kamoutsas? Governor Lukis?

**Ashley Lukis:**

Here.

**Amanda Gay:**

Governor Lydecker? Governor Mateer?

**Craig Mateer:**

Here.

**Amanda Gay:**

Governor Oktay?

**Michael Oktay:**

Here.

**Amanda Gay:**

We have quorum, Chair.

**Chair Levine:**

This is the part of the meeting where the Chair gives a state-of-the-system address to the Board and to our stakeholders and I'll ask you to forgive me, I know that it's my nature to be very brief and not talk too much, so I'll try to stay consistent with my past practice. This may be a little long, but this is my first one. I've been on this Board for 12 years and so I do have some observations about where we've come from and where we're going and what I hope we can focus on over the next couple years.

First, I want to thank our friends at Florida State University for the wonderful welcome and hospitality. The leadership combination of Chair Peter Collins and President Rick McCullough is one that I think we can all be proud of. President McCullough, you've proven yourself to be a leader worthy of leading an institution as great as Florida State University.

When faced with the challenge of violence on your campus, whether the potential for encampments or an actual shooting, you didn't hide from the challenge or make excuses. You leaned in, you owned it, you confronted it. You know, leadership is easy when it's easy.

You showed how a leader acts when it's hard and you were very inspirational during that time. I also want to thank the members of the Board of Governors who preceded each of us. Some of them are sitting around the table, some of them are at home. We all stand, each of us, stand on the shoulders of those who came before us, and I'm particularly grateful for those who served with courage and chose not to bend when it would have been easy to as we made very difficult decisions along the way. And I want to welcome our new recently appointed members, each of whom brings their own experience and wisdom to the mutual work that we have ahead. We enter 2026 as the undisputed number one system of higher education in the country, a distinction we have held since 2016.

The recognitions are too numerous to list here and much of the data is before you in our annual report. All of this data, all of the awards, all of the rankings are affirmation of the hard work that has been done. Instead of using my time to recite what you can read for yourself, I'd like to share my perspective about why we're here.

Nothing is more objective about success than the results of a competitive marketplace in higher education, and the market has spoken profoundly about Florida. At my beloved alma mater, the University of Florida, we saw this year what could be as many as 100,000 applicants. At Florida State, my wife's beloved alma mater, more than 90,000.

At FIU, almost 50,000. At USF, 71,000. And at New College, they've achieved record enrollment with an average GPA of 4.0. Students are not choosing our universities merely because of metrics or rankings, they're choosing our universities because of the underlying quality and value of the educational experience and the degrees that we produce. For example, the University of South Florida being admitted to the AAU was a landmark moment in our system's history, as it's the first since the University of Florida was admitted back while I was a student. USF's ascension from a commuter school 30 years ago to one of America's AAU powerhouse universities underscores the seriousness of our efforts to educate our students and to conduct world-class research that contributes to our economy and to our world. We didn't get here by doing things the way the formerly elite academic institutions did things.

We chose to make college more accessible and affordable by freezing tuition more than a decade ago and challenging ourselves to become more efficient. Others chose a different path, increasing the cost of a degree and saddling graduates with a whopping \$1.8 trillion in student debt. In Florida, more than three-quarters of our students graduate with no debt at all, and as a system, we have among the lowest debt loads in the nation.

At \$6,300 a year, our annual tuition is about half of the national average. And that's thanks to the support of our governors and the legislature over the course of time when we started down this path. In Florida, we embarked upon efforts to focus on the importance of civil discourse, Western values, and high-quality STEM education. Other systems and universities that call themselves elite chose to prioritize curriculum infused with ideology and identity. The results? Our four-year graduation rates are up to 66 percent, while the national average is 46.

Seventy-five percent of our bachelor's degree graduates are employed or continuing their education, earning a median wage of \$51,000 one year after graduation. Some universities have allowed ideology to sink its teeth into some of the most basic parts of their campuses, even into places like math and elementary education. Perhaps this is why, when students on many of these so-called elite college campuses marched in favor of terrorists and targeted the safety of fellow Americans and Jews on their campus, the leadership of those universities found themselves frozen, incapable of leading right when leadership was needed most.

In Florida, our university leadership said no to bringing fear on our campuses, and we protected our students. In a recent national survey of Jewish college students, 83 percent reported experiencing anti-Semitism, including being targeted, excluded, or harassed for their beliefs. In Florida, that rate is nearly 50 percent lower, indicating the effectiveness of our policies, while also underscoring there's more work to do. No student should come on campus and be in fear because of what their religious belief is, no matter what their faith. While some education leaders have promoted identity- and race-driven admissions processes, we in Florida focused on merit, as Governor Dale pointed out earlier, and at the same time, we improved access for deserving students who otherwise might not have been able to afford an education, regardless of race. That's why our Pell Grant graduation rates are among the best in the nation. It's why, in an area of great need, our nursing board pass rates are 94 percent above the national average, helping to solve a major national problem. Our HBCU, one that I'm very proud of, FAMU, is the number one public HBCU in the nation, but better than that, overall, they're one of the top 100 schools in the nation, period. I think many of us remember back in 2015 when their goal was to get to a 39 percent six-year graduation rate.

We've come an awful long way. We have 71 National Academy members, and we've dedicated over \$200 million over the past two years for recruitment and retention of world-class faculty. And for the eighth consecutive year, five of our institutions earned placements on the National Academy of Inventors Top 100 U.S. and Worldwide University lists, University of Florida, USF, UCF, FIU, and Florida State University. And we've exceeded \$3 billion in research, a first in our history, and an ambitious goal that was set during my time as chair of the Research and Academic Excellence Committee.

So back to why our 431,000 students choose our universities. The success we've had becoming the most sought-after institutions in America was no accident.

And make no mistake, we are not immune to the things that can rot an institution from the inside, as we've seen in so many places around the country. Here in Florida, yes, some of our universities were teaching aspiring elementary school teachers inclusive math, gender and sexuality, and pedagogy designed around the very indoctrination none of us thought we would be teaching our teachers to teach young children. Thanks to the work of our education commissioners and our legislature, and the help of our universities, we're solving that problem.

But this example of how curriculum, hidden in the shadows, demonstrates how insidious it can be when we take our eyes off of what's important and the product that we are really trying to deliver. That product is knowledge. That's our product. That's what we produce. The ability to think critically and not be told what to think. The ability to draw conclusions based on facts and values rather than being afraid to challenge ideas and concepts that differ from your perspective. The confidence in your technical, professional, and linguistic ability to leave the university setting and become among the most sought-after next generation of engineers, scientists, doctors, lawyers, and thought leaders. That's our product.

The tension between classic liberalism and conservatism have endured as bedrocks of higher education since Thomas Jefferson. And so this tension is not the enemy of education, it's the reason for it. The issue choice we must make is, are we committed to graduating students who believe in the bedrock American principles of merit, capitalism, and lifting people out of poverty through the power of their own ideas and their own capabilities, or are we satisfied graduating students who believe in socialism? As recently as October, a new poll of college students by Axios and the Generation Lab proved the point of my concern. 67% of students held a positive or neutral opinion of the word socialism, compared with only 40% that hold the same view about capitalism. Another poll by Yale found that nearly 40% of college students said physical violence can be justified to prevent a person from spewing hate. You don't need to look far to see the manifestation of this, just turn on the television.

That same poll found that 33% of students said that Palestine is a better ally to the United States, while only 29% said Israel was a better friend. Again, these things have consequences. If you turn on the TV, you see it manifesting itself.

This isn't just an ideological discussion, it's the foundation of our country. As Lauren Noble, the director of the William F. Buckley Institute at Yale said, America's colleges and universities still have a lot of work to do, and she went on to say that while there is cause for hope, it is clear American higher education is in trouble.

She's not wrong. The very foundation of the economic system that has lifted more people around the world from poverty, cured more disease, solved more problems, and improved the human condition is under threat if our system of higher education doesn't do its basic job. Rankings and awards matter not if we lose the very foundation of our economic and social systems because higher education failed to honor what our founders envisioned.

As I said, this isn't a side issue, it's the issue of our time. In the 250th year of our country, now seems like a good time to reinvigorate our efforts, to recognize our place as institutions that are the guardrails of liberty. Those who tilt the education experience to be partial to the building blocks of communism and socialism often fail to teach that these systems have led to as many as 100 million deaths ranging from executions to famine, forced labor to deportations. Griffing, consolidation of power, death, and suffering are not the byproducts of socialism. They're the reason for it. It's easy for people to dismiss this as merely a political issue, but it's not and it does have consequences.

Indoctrination has been on our campuses for decades and pushing back to make sure our students are given the opportunity to truly learn about the differences is the least we can do for them. We must trust our students to be able to draw their own conclusions, but we owe it to them to make sure they are given all the information. It's known that as much as 20% of college rankings include reputational scores as judged from university presidents in other states, and I'm the first to say our rankings are something that we're proud of and we should be, but I would surmise that our approach to higher education in Florida might not be popular with some of the very academic leaders that have brought us \$1.8 trillion in student debt, graduates who favor socialism, and students who believe a terrorist regime is preferable to a Western democracy. If given the choice between performing for them or making our students graduate with clear heads about their futures, personally I choose our students every time without exception.

In that light, in front of you is a gift from me for members of the Board of Governors. It's a short storybook and in it is a story called A Message to Garcia. Actually it's just a printout because the books didn't get to me in time. It was a gift, the book A Message to Garcia was a gift given to me by Governor Jeb Bush when I joined his administration in 2003. This story was written in 1899, and while some of the language is a bit harsh due to its time, the story itself is timeless. As it goes, President McKinley was attempting to get a message to the opposition leader in Cuba, Garcia, during the Spanish-American War. Obviously that wasn't an easy thing to do back then, and he was offered up a young soldier named Rowan who would deliver the message. President McKinley wrote the message and the young soldier left, delivering the message weeks later. The story accentuates how innovation, entrepreneurship, problem solving, and critical thinking saved the moment.

You see, Rowan didn't stop to ask who Garcia was. He didn't ask President McKinley why the message needed to be delivered. He didn't protest the harsh conditions or risk he was being asked to take. He didn't ask for suggestions on how to map out the path to Garcia, and he didn't wait for the government bureaucracy to make the rules and tell him what he was and wasn't allowed to do or how many hours he had to work. He was left to his own ingenuity. He took the message and he figured it out.

The author, even back in 1899, is drawing the distinction between the ideas behind capitalism and why socialism doesn't work. The person who risks everything to start a business, and as I look around the table, I see many of you who've taken the risk to start a business and the ups and downs of dealing with the economy and all the risks

that come along with that. The person who doesn't sleep because he stands to lose everything.

The person who wakes up each day because she is determined to succeed. Every one of our graduates needs to be equipped to understand these core values. And so what does this mean to us as board members?

We are the messengers. We are Rowan. Our students are President McKinley. They're tasking us to be entrepreneurs, risk takers, and thought leaders who will make sure that the students are equipped with what they need in order to be successful. That we have more applicants for admission to our system than we have ever had indicates that they, in fact, do trust us to be their messengers, to deliver on the promise that they will be safe, that they'll learn what they need to learn in order to achieve their economic and personal dreams, that they will leave the universities prepared to contribute to our society and to our republic in a meaningful way, and they will leave the universities with the confidence they have invested several years of their lives on something that will generate a lifetime of return for that investment. So colleagues, I ask you, as my friends and colleagues on the Board of Governors, take, use the opportunity you've been given by Governor DeSantis and by the legislature to be the messenger.

And now in the spirit of civil discourse, it's fair to point out that there is an alternative viewpoint to the message to Garcia, and there's been criticism of it. That's okay. I've read their discourse, and while I choose to believe the message in a message to Garcia, it seems appropriate to lead by example as leaders of our system and to share with you the paper criticizing it, which is before you as well.

And just as we hope happens on our campuses, you can read both sides and decide for yourself what your takeaway is. But you are being given the information. So, besides some of these core issues that motivate me, and what are the why behind why I'm here, what are some of the priorities that I think we should have dialogue about over the coming year?

First accreditation. Florida led the fight to provide our institutions with options for accreditation, and our chancellors worked with other ascending elite institutions from other states to develop the new Commission for Public Higher Education. Governor Jones has been a key part of that as a leader of the strategic planning committee. As of November, ten institutions have submitted letters of intent to seek accreditation, and here in Florida, beyond that, our Attorney General, James Uthmeier, successfully sought and received Supreme Court backing to remove the lock the American Bar Association has on who can accredit law schools. Continuing this important effort, I'm asking Chancellor Rodrigues to work with the Academic Excellence and Economic Growth Committee, led by Governor Good, to evaluate accreditation standards for medical schools. Physicians produced by medical schools must be of the highest competence. We need to learn what the standards are for admission, curriculum, and outcomes. If they're anything but merit-based, Florida should consider its options.

Student safety and campus safety. We saw firsthand the tragedy of students and faculty becoming human targets on one of our campuses. I recall the day President McCullough called to tell me they were in the midst of an active shooting on campus at Florida State, and it was one of the darkest moments during my tenure on this board. For that moment, I felt a personal sense of responsibility for what our students were facing, what the faculty were facing, and I felt completely helpless, which was a terrible feeling to have. The board chair of Florida State and the president worked as a team to put students first in their response, and our Chancellor took advantage of the opportunity to learn what had occurred by assembling a summit, and that summit bore results. Governor DeSantis included funding in his recommended budget to improve student safety, and wise leaders in the House and Senate, Senator Gates and Representative Salzman, have filed bills to support our efforts. The safety of our students is our highest priority, and that's why I'm asking the board to join me in establishing a Campus Safety and Student Success Committee, which I've appointed Ashley Bell Barnett to lead, and as a first, I'm appointing our student representative Carson Dale to serve as vice chair, a tradition that I hope continues.

President Dale himself experienced the violence resulting from the Iran-Hamas attacks on Israel as he was leading students through Israel when the 12-day war began. I communicated with Carson while he was there through text, and was inspired by his courage and his thoughtfulness towards his fellow students. We're truly fortunate, Carson, to have you on this board, and now to have you in a position of leadership on the board.

AI and cyber security, there are literally billions of devices connected to the interstate and to the internet in the United States, providing the opportunity for both flow of information as well as opportunity for AI to penetrate every aspect of our lives. As the Florida legislature considers the AI Bill of Rights, it's important that we acknowledge that with this high degree of connectivity, the introduction of AI presents opportunities and challenges beyond our current comprehension. Dario Imodai is the founder of a \$350 billion AI company, Anthropic. He warns that two things are true. For the security of our nation, we must not allow China to control the advancement of AI. He says that permitting that to happen would, "make as much sense as selling nuclear weapons to North Korea and bragging that the missile casings are made by Boeing." He calls for democracies to maintain AI supremacy because the alternative is AI-enabled totalitarianism that humanity would not be able to escape from. He also predicts 10 to 20% GDP growth alongside AI, potentially displacing 50% of entry-level white-collar jobs in the next one to five years, half of entry-level work. The bottom line is this, AI models are psychologically complex and can be destructive for reasons that may be unpredictable.

Our universities lead in the areas of AI. We all know the work that we're already doing, distributing it throughout our curriculum and throughout our campuses. I point to the creation of the Bellini College of Artificial Intelligence, Cybersecurity, and Computing at USF as an example, and the vision of CyberBay, an example where our universities can take lead, not only in the opportunities for AI, but also in developing the type of governance standards that are needed to bring order to it.

As AI is being integrated into curriculum throughout our system, we need to understand what the opportunity and risk is. I'm proposing the formation of an AI Cybersecurity Task Force to work with the legislature and Governor on implementation of the AI Bill of Rights, and I've asked Ed Haddock to lead this task force. As one of the leaders of the AI technology space has said, this technology is one to two years from matching human capability across the board, that governance is the binding constraint, and that his own AI models that he's developed exhibit a concerning psychological complexity that makes the stakes civilizational.

I was invited recently to participate in a strategic planning session around AI by the University of Colorado System, and one of my takeaways was that four guardrails must exist as universities stake out their place with AI. Number one, the respect for privacy. Number two, ensuring that the use of AI is ethical to its application. Number three, that there's broad understanding of the risk and that its use is secure. The work of this task force will be important in helping us to understand the impact of AI on our students and how we protect our universities and our students from its unintended consequences. I share with you some language that President Corcoran sent to his students on his campus recently.

If AI does the thinking, the writing, the analysis, or the problem solving for you, then you are not learning those skills yourself. The goal of a new college education is not to produce polished outputs, but to develop judgment, insight, creativity, and intellectual independence. Those are precisely the capacities that distinguish you from a machine, and they are also the skills that will matter most in a world where AI is increasingly present. Students who learn how to work with AI thoughtfully will thrive. Students who let AI replace their learning risk being replaced by AI. Pretty powerful words and very true.

Intercollegiate athletics. Like many people in this room, I'm an avid fan of college sports, and I have a special love for my college team. But college sports is not what it was only a few years ago. To some of us, that's a good thing. To others, it feels like the Wild West. Last year, we were asked to authorize our universities to open up their auxiliaries so our universities could fund up to \$22 million annually to cover the revenue sharing authorized by the legal settlement. But this is not the end of it. While our regulation has a sunset, the financial implications will continue well beyond that sunset. We've asked the universities to develop plans, and they're working on that. And we've seen tens of millions of dollars being used to pay coaches, and in some cases, to pay coaches not to coach. We've seen now where from the 2021 class of high school football quarterback recruits, eight of the top 10 quarterbacks entered the transfer portal. Studies of elite quarterback recruits showed that 126 out of 168 ended up transferring.

I'm not saying whether this is good or bad. I don't know. But what I am saying is that our collegiate programs are becoming semi-professional, if not professional. I don't know what this means about the future of college sports, but I do know there is a lot of money involved, and we need better visibility as to what our university's plans are. I've proposed the formation of the Intercollegiate Athletics Task Force, led by Governor Jones, and I've taken the unprecedented step of appointing non-BOG members to this

task force, including trustee chairs and athletic directors, to help us learn and lean into this.

I want to be clear. Our goal is to support our universities in their effort to be competitive and to be top-tier athletic powerhouses. That's what we want for everybody. I also want to point out that intercollegiate athletics is highly competitive, and I've asked the Chancellor to do everything possible to protect competitively sensitive information. If necessary, we may ask the legislature to provide help in protecting information which could be used by other state universities and competitors to harm our great institutions.

Budget. Last year, we implemented budget metrics to look at the balance sheets of our universities and to begin to prepare ourselves for a time when the legislature may have priorities that are outsized to the revenue available to them. We've been very fortunate to have the investment we've had for our institutions over the past decade, and we haven't squandered it. We've kept tuition low, we've made some hard decisions about academic programs that may or may not have had the ROI necessary to keep them in place, and we've been far more transparent about how we use public money than at any time in history. But that's not enough. I'm asking Vice Chair Tim Cerio, who chairs the Budget and Finance Committee, to work with our system CFOs to prepare for what the various scenarios might be for university funding, given different out-year state budget scenarios. And I'm asking Tim to work with Facilities Chair Ken Jones, along with our trustee chairs, on a strategy for deferred maintenance funding. Deferred maintenance is a problem that we've got to get resolved, and we really do want to lock arms with the legislature and the Governor to figure out a solution. I'm also asking that we take lead in using AI to evaluate physical space to determine actual use and whether there are alternatives to new construction that better utilize existing space.

You know, these are just a few of the priorities. Our SUS 30 really lays out the roadmap for us, and I think all of us had a say in that and a part to play in the development of that. So our goal is to move forward with SUS 30, focus on some of the priorities that I've laid out, and I think that we'll learn a lot in the coming year. As I look around the room at our board members, trustee leaders, and presidents, it's no surprise to me that we are the number one system in the United States. I see entrepreneurs, innovators, leaders, and genuinely good people.

Whatever the challenges are, I know that we are all up to the task. Thank each of you for your service, and God bless you all. Okay. Now we'll get to the chancellor's report, which I believe is much shorter than mine.

**Chancellor Rodrigues:**

What I try to do in the Chancellor's report is update you on what I see as significant developments in higher education since our last meeting.

I've only got three items to go over today. The first is, I think we saw something significant over the last three weeks, which is the president of Harvard appeared on a podcast the second week of January, and on that podcast made some remarks that I want to share with you because I think they're significant. The first was he was pleased

to say that he thinks there's a real movement to restore balance in teaching and to bring back the idea that you really need to be objective in the classroom. President Garber went on to explain that ideological freedom and the freedom to express ideas was a foundational concept during his college years, but noted that as younger faculty had been hired at Harvard, that former staple of higher education had changed. He objected to the pushing of opinions on students and said that the job of the university was to provide education. Specifically, he went on to say, we're not about activism. We should not be pushing particular points of view. That's a remarkable change for Harvard from where they have been, particularly over the last five years. Last week, the Dartmouth College president gave an interview in a Wall Street Journal op-ed, well she did an op-ed and she gave an interview after the op-ed, but she said assuming that Americans value our mission, speaking of higher education, is a recipe for irrelevance and decline. We must demonstrate to students and families and the broader public that we have heard their criticisms. And then she went on to specify the steps that needed to be taken so the public would have confidence in higher ed. The first is make college affordable. The second, recognize that accountability is just as important as affordability in ensuring there's a return on investment for graduates after they earn their degree. The third, recenter higher education on learning rather than political posturing. She acknowledged the ideological capture that's present in higher ed and said that institutions needed to embrace institutional neutrality to address it, particularly on issues that don't directly affect the academic mission or their core functions. Fourth, she emphasized the need to pursue equal opportunity and get away from this goal of attempting to achieve equal outcomes. And then finally, wrapped up her interview by acknowledging that testing is important and that it was a mistake for institutions to abandon standardized admissions tests like the SAT and the ACT because they were admitting students who could not do the work, which ultimately fueled grade inflation at many of the Ivy League institutions.

So when I read those interviews and I see those comments, it just reminds me that the three guiding principles for the State University System of Florida, at least dating back to 2012 when we came out of the Great Recession and implemented performance-based funding, have been accountability, affordability, and academic excellence. And we've never deviated from a path that advances those three principles. And it's good to see that the Ivy League, which gets a lot of media coverage, probably more media coverage in terms of being given credit for what's happening in higher ed than really is happening, but it is good to see that at least two prominent Ivy League presidents have recognized that they need to course correct and the path that they are pushing their institutions toward is the path that our State University System is on and has been on since 2012.

The second point for today is, as you know, we are in session. We're now coming to the end of the third week. The two big items in session are the budget and any policy bills that will impact higher ed. I've shared this on calls with the presidents before. I'll say it publicly because I think it needs to be heard. Our current year budget in Florida is less than our prior year budget. The expectation that I have is that the budget that they pass for next year will be less than the budget we're operating under this year. We are working very hard on our legislative budget request, but it is important to frame

expectations around reality. The State of Florida does not have the same amount of money or is not projected to have in the out years, as the Chair mentioned, the same amount of money for the entire budget that they've had in the past.

They will have to balance the budget and make some hard decisions. We will continue to advocate for higher education because I believe we've demonstrated we are indeed an investment for the state. I will be looking to each of the university's government relations teams to continue to be the strong partners that they have been as we work our way through the appropriations process this year.

The second is on policy. I think the most significant bill that is moving on policy is a school safety bill. The Chair mentioned after the tragedy that occurred on campus last year on April 17th, we convened a Safety Summit in October. The bill sponsor of the school safety bill reached out to me after that Safety Summit and asked for what we produced from that Safety Summit and told me that she would be running a, Representative Salzman, would be running a school safety bill and wanted to incorporate the recommendations that came out of that summit. She has done that. She has also added to her bill the expansion of the K-12 guardian program to be an option for our presidents.

There is, just like in the original guardian program, there is nothing mandatory about that in terms of participation. It is completely optional, but she believes it is another tool that should be available to our presidents as they are putting together their campus safety programs. So I'm pleased to see that in that program, I'm sorry, in that bill, she has school hardening as one of the other items in the bill and has a recommendation to support the request we made, a \$20 million request to ensure that all of the doors can lock from the inside.

That bill is moving. We will continue to monitor it and frankly, it's a bill I think we should be supporting as it moves forward so that our presidents have every tool available for the safety of their students. And that concludes my report.

**Chair Levine:**

Thank you, Chancellor. It's encouraging to see that others are starting to follow our lead. That's great. Now, we'll move to public comment. Amanda, have we received any requests for public comment at this time?

**Amanda Gay:**

Yes, Chair Levine. We have received five requests for public comment. As a reminder, a maximum of 15 minutes is reserved for public comment. Individuals and representatives of organizations will be allowed three minutes to offer comments on an item on the agenda. As a reminder, pursuant to the board operating procedures, public comment must pertain to agenda items before the board.

**Chair Levine:**

Yes.

**Amanda Gay:**

I will call up the first three. [inaudible] Yes, I will go ahead and call up the first three. The first will be Laura Hampton. The second will be Ginger Lyon. And then the third will be Jack Rowan. So, Laura Hampton, you may proceed.

**Laura Hampton:**

Hello, everyone. Good morning slash afternoon. Hello, governors, members of the press, members of the public. My name is Laura Hampton and I'm a graduate of New College of Florida. I'm speaking on behalf of the Novo Collegian Alliance. My comments are on Consent Agenda Item Article 9, Section 7, Florida Constitution Regulation 5.001 on the performance-based funding metric 8 for New College specifically. So, this metric tracks the percent of FTIC first time in college students with a 4.0 or higher GPA. The first issue, the benchmark 42% is way too low for an honors college. The second and more important issue, Richard Corcoran is shrinking first time in college student enrollment at New College from being historically around 85% to now being only 65% of his incoming class.

Even worse, President Corcoran enrolled 15% fewer FTICs in fall 2025 compared to the previous year, even though he had tens of millions of dollars more in legislative funding. The smaller the number of FTICs, the greater the chance that retention and graduation rates will continue on the current downward trajectory. We encourage you to pull this item from the Consent Agenda, raise the benchmark to an honors college level, and ask President Corcoran to explain why there is a decline in FTICs at New College. Thank you. Thank you.

**Amanda Gay:**

Our next speaker is Ginger Lyon.

**Ginger Lyon:**

Good Morning, I'm Ginger Lyon of Atlanta, Georgia. I'm a 1970s graduate of New College and of the Emory University School of Nursing. I'm a retired geriatric and psychiatric nurse. I consider Sarasota my second home. I'm speaking today to agenda item number 1436, pertaining to nursing education and data collection, and particularly how this item may have an effect on Higher Education Bill 1004.32. The governor, as recently as last week, underlined the value of the line and pipeline programs. Collaboration between nursing education programs and health care providers is vital to meeting workforce demand. To rip a nursing school out of a community is a wound to that whole community. To do so with a six-month deadline, as called for in the House bill, is needlessly cruel. The House bill calls for the transfer of USFSM to New College, the transfer of the campus, but not the programs and the people which will be evicted from the campus.

**Amanda Gay:**

Ms. Lyon, please make sure your comments are on an item on our agenda today.

**Ginger Lyon:**

Thank you. I don't think I need to state how important a nursing school is to a community and the other 40 programs at USFSM, including criminal justice and the liberal arts. The reason for this transfer, as stated by President Corcoran himself and the trustees, is to solve the ongoing housing crisis at New College, a crisis which has cost taxpayers millions of dollars as students are housed in off-campus hotels and facilities. It is the sworn duty of the Board of Governors to advocate for the State University System's unique role.

**Amanda Gay:**

Ms. Lyon, your three minutes is up.

**Ginger Lyon:**

Thank you very much.

**Amanda Gay:**

Next will be Jack Rowan. Following Jack Rowan will be Daniel Fay and then Catherine Jones.

**Jack Rowan:**

Mr. Chairman and Governors, my name is Jack Rowan and I'm a third year proud double nole at FSU College of Law. It might be sheer coincidence, but I could think of no better place for this board to receive its professional and graduate degree excellence program report than FSU. In both my time as a law student and as a leader in graduate student governance, I've been fortunate to see FSU make leaps and bounds in graduate and professional education. At the College of Law, my cohort started on a strange note.

Soon after many of us enrolled, we got an email. Our ranking had gone down a few places and the college was promising us they'd do more. They didn't. They did everything. In just two years, the College of Law has moved up nine places and is now the top law school in the state. We've become a place for more robust legal education or robust legal scholarship and for policymakers to discuss the future of Florida.

Our law journals, including the FSU Law Review, have pushed the frontiers of the law through publication of articles on everything from AI to laws governing satellites. And as editor-in-chief, I'm particularly proud to say that the FSU Law Review will be publishing a tribute to our former president and Florida giant, John Thrasher, in the coming month. The FSU College of Law is thriving and with your continued support, will reach new heights.

As a graduate student leader in the FSU Congress of Graduate Students, I've seen my fellow Noles, be they double or triple Noles, domestic students just arriving at FSU, or international students just arriving in America, thrive over the last three years as this

university continues to prioritize graduate education and invest in graduate students. Our research pushes the state and nation forward, our professionals will drive the national conversation, and our graduates will set the cutting edge in academia. If I can leave you with one takeaway, it is this.

Graduate education is key to higher education. As goes graduate education, so goes the rest of higher ed. Continued investment in graduate education and removing roadblocks to Florida having the best of the best in its SUS will not just keep Florida on top, but put us in a commanding lead.

Thank you.

**Amanda Gay:**

Thank you. Next is Daniel Fay.

**Daniel Fay:**

Good morning. I'm Daniel Fay. I've published extensively on higher education governance, most recently looking at the reorganization of the Florida state system and how it made the system resilient to the financial crisis as opposed to other states. And I'm speaking today in opposition of the H-1B ban language. I think it would have drastic effects on the system's performance. I have published a study about the makeup of faculty at universities and how that affects graduation rates. If we were to implement an H-1B ban, we could see a dramatic decrease in graduation rates across the system. Total graduation rates would fall by about 10% for each percentage change in H-1B faculty decrease. This would affect subgroups more dramatically for women, for white populations, for black populations, for Hispanic populations.

And not only in terms of graduation rates, we would see financial impacts with decreased expenditures, increased reliance on state appropriations and decreased opportunities for federal revenue. So I encourage the board to vote against this provision. Thank you.

**Amanda Gay:**

Thank you. And next and last up is Catherine Jones.

**Cathrine Jones:**

My name is Catherine Jones. I'm faculty in biology at Florida State University, but I speak for myself. I'm speaking against the ban on H-1B visa hiring. I have so many colleagues that I highly value who were originally hired on H-1B visas who are now citizens. I've served on multiple faculty search committees that have reviewed many applications. And so often, in order to provide the best expertise in a field for educating our students, for building a research program, for providing service to the university, we evaluate those application packages for the best fit for a position. And so often that best, well, not even so often, but a significant amount of time, that best fit is someone who is hired on an H-1B visa but who has been trained in the United States, who has done their Ph.D. and or their postdoc in the United States, has benefited from training in

the U.S. And by not hiring with an H-1B visa program, we would be giving away the expertise we've invested in international scholars.

We would lose that for the U.S., for the state of Florida. I really advocate for retaining hiring on the H-1B visa program for universities because this provides beloved courses for our students taught by these faculty, excellent research programs, and service to our universities. And I think that voting against hiring on H-1B visas is actually a vote against merit.

The board values merit and has talked about merit extensively. This is a vote against merit for our universities. Thank you.

**Chair Levine:**

Okay, that concludes public comment. Thank you to each of the members of the public that came. Great comments, very helpful. Now, we're going to spend some time acknowledging the outstanding dedication and leadership to the State University System of Florida by recognizing several individuals through the adoption of resolutions. First, I'm going to take up former Board of Governors Chair Brian Lamb. It's no secret to any of us that Brian's involvement in higher ed started at the University of South Florida. I'm pretty sure he played basketball there, too. He attended USF, eventually joined the Board of Trustees, and then rose in the ranks to become the USF Board of Trustees Chair. He then came over to the Board of Governors, appointed by Governor DeSantis, one of his, I think, first appointments, where he served various committees in various capacities. Most notably, served as the Chair of the Board of Governors for an unprecedented two consecutive terms. He's been an advocate for good governance, for accountability, and for moving the needle forward. During his tenure, Florida continued to hold the recognition of being ranked number one in higher education.

I want to thank Brian for his stewardship, his leadership, and for continuing to push the Board and the system to continue to achieve excellence. Would any other members like to contribute remarks before we vote on the resolution? Okay, seeing none, do I have a motion to adopt the resolution honoring Brian Lamb?

**Carson Good:**

So moved.

**Chair Levine:**

Got a motion by Good.

**Timothy Cerio:**

Second.

**Chair Levine:**

Any discussion? All those in favor, say aye.

**Group:**

Aye.

**Chair Levine:**

Opposed, no. Show that adopted with gratitude. Next, we'll recognize Governor Jose Oliva, who's not present today. Governor Oliva is the epitome of public service, having served Floridians in the Florida House of Representatives, serving as the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and serving on this Board of Governors since 2023. Governor Oliva provided a lot of leadership, probably mostly because of his integrity. He's a good man who I relied very heavily on because of his high degree of integrity, being able to distinguish right from wrong, and not being afraid to speak up for it when he sees it. It is a loss that Governor Oliva is no longer on the Board, but I'm confident that his commitment and his contributions to the state university system of Florida are not over. Thank you, Governor Oliva, for your commitment to Florida and for the leadership you provided to this Board. Any other comments by any other members? Governor Cerio.

**Timothy Cerio:**

I'd just like to say something about Jose. You know, I considered myself a pretty fiscal conservative, and Jose makes me feel like an irresponsible profligate spender. He loves the arena, the political arena, the policy arena, doesn't tolerate fools, bullies, or bad policy peddlers, and he will be missed.

**Chair Levine:**

Governor Edge.

**Aubrey Edge:**

I'd like to echo that and also say that we're going to miss his very refreshing honesty in everything that he said and did. Thank you.

**Chair Levine:**

Any other comments? If not, is there a motion to approve the resolution for Governor Jose Oliva?

**Timothy Cerio:**

So moved.

**Chair Levine:**

Got a motion.

**Aubrey Edge:**

Second.

**Chair Levine:**

Any discussion? If none, all those in favor say aye.

**Group:**

Aye.

**Chair Levine:**

Any opposed, no. All right, show that adopted unanimously. Next, Governor Paul Renner. Governor Renner, also a steadfast public servant, began his service on this Board in 2025 and quickly demonstrated a thoughtful and measured approach to governance. He served in the Florida legislature and was selected by his colleagues to be Speaker of the House of Representatives, where he championed a lot of the higher ed policy that we've implemented. I would also be remiss if I did not account for Governor Renner's service to our nation as a United States Navy veteran and who served in active combat. Governor Renner, thank you for your service to our system, to Florida, and to the nation. I understand he may be online today. If he is, Governor, would you like to say anything? He's not? Okay, he's not online. So, are there any other comments? If none, is there a motion?

**Aubrey Edge:**

Motion.

**Chair Levine:**

Motion by Edge.

**Ken Jones:**

Second.

**Chair Levine:**

Second by Jones. Any discussion? If none, all those in favor say aye.

**Group:**

Aye.

**Chair Levine:**

Any opposed, no. Okay. The next is Governor Eric Silagy. Governor Silagy has served this board with passion since his appointment in 2019. He served on various committees as well, and he served as the vice chair from 2022 to 2024. Governor Silagy brought a wealth of knowledge to the board, having served on the Florida Council of 100, the Florida Chamber of Commerce, and the Energy Security Leadership Council. I know that Governor Corcoran wanted to be here personally to speak about Governor Silagy, but he had to get back home. That was a joke. I was kidding.

**Timothy Cerio:**

If you have to explain the joke. It's not a good one.

**Chair Levine:**

I clearly need to work on this. So, anyway, are there any other comments about Governor Silagy? If none, is there a motion?

**Timothy Cerio:**

Motion

**Chair Levine**

Got a motion. Got a second?

**Ken Jones:**

Second.

**Chair Levine:**

Jones. Okay. Any more discussion? If none, all those in favor say aye

**Group:**

Aye.

**Chair Levine:**

Any opposed, no. All right, show it adopted. And finally, we have a resolution to honor our own Rachel Kamoutsis. Rachel began her service at the Board of Governors as General Counsel and Corporate Secretary. And in these roles, she demonstrated incredible professionalism and commitment to the system and navigated various issues with composure and grace. It was no surprise when she was elevated by the Chancellor to be Chief of Staff, where she provided leadership to all of us and helped us collaborate with the board, the system, the university leadership to advance the mission priorities and effectiveness of the system. She has now moved on to her next venture, which most of us know she was selected by Governor DeSantis to serve as a judge. I think some of us are going to be going down to see her investiture tomorrow. Are there any additional remarks about Rachel?

**Aubrey Edge:**

Mr. Chair? Is it possible to trade Stasi for Rachel?

**Chair Levine:**

Somebody said he'd make a great judge. Yes, he would make a great judge.

**Anastasios Kamoutsas:**

Yes. If I may, Chair?

**Chair Levine:**

Yes, Governor. Not that you have a conflict of interest or anything.

**Anastasios Kamoutsas:**

No offense, Chancellor Rodrigues, but Rachel's obviously the most beautiful employee that the Board of Governors has ever had. I may be partial there, but I get to see not just her balancing the work, but how she does it in the household. And many of you know the struggle that I am going through by myself with the four girls during the work week as she's working at Orlando. A lot that, quite frankly, I didn't realize she did to keep our house in order. Today was another day that I forgot lunch and had to figure it out with her and, of course, couldn't have done it without her. But the reality is she is not just a consummate professional. She is a God-fearing, hardworking, intelligent, humble, gracious individual, and I am so blessed to be her husband and very thankful and honored that Governor DeSantis elevated her because it was very well-deserved. Thank you.

**Chair Levine:**

Well said, Stasi. Any other comments about Rachel?

**Timothy Cerio:**

Just very quickly, Mr. Chair. You know, I got to know Rachel as we were bringing her on, and as a lawyer, I will tell you she is . . . obviously, she is going to make a tremendous appellate judge, but she was an excellent, excellent lawyer. And woe to anyone who dealt with her who underestimated her. She did a fabulous job, and she represented this board well.

**Chair Levine:**

Governor Bell-Barnett?

**Ashley Bell-Barnett:**

I came on two years ago, and I just wanted to say Rachel was such a shining light. She was just so generous in her time in making me feel included and actually giving me all of the history related to each and every motion that we were going to speak on. And it was a delight to see her become a mother number four, still while maintaining such decor and being on at all times and doing all the late-night events as well. And I just have the utmost respect for her and love her in her new position, but she was instrumental in making sure that I felt welcomed and also was activated with all that was to be done. So, congratulations, Rachel.

**Chair Levine:**

Any other comments? It really is good to see good things happen to good people. It does warm your heart to see somebody get something they deserve. So, is there a motion?

**Anastasios Kamoutsas:**

Motion.

**Chair Levine:**

Got a motion by...

**Unknown speaker:**

Stasi.

**Chair Levine:**

Commissioner—Second?

**Carson Good:**

Second.

**Chair Levine:**

Good? Okay. Any discussion? If none, all those in favor say aye.

**Group:**

Aye.

**Chair Levine:**

Any opposed, no. Congratulations, Rachel. Okay. We're going to move on to...now we've gotten the controversial things out of the way, we'll now move on to the easy stuff, the confirmation of the University of West Florida President, Manny Diaz. Such a great day to have you here and be able to have an opportunity to vote on your candidacy for president. Interim President Diaz was recommended by the UWF Presidential Search Committee as the sole finalist to be considered by the University of West Florida Board of Trustees due to his exemplary qualifications and the great job he had done as the interim president. On January 8, 2026, the UWF Board of Trustees selected Mr. Diaz as the University of West Florida's next president. Pursuant to Board of Governors Regulation 1.002, UWF Board of Trustees Chair, Rebecca Matthews, requests that the Board of Governors confirm Mr. Diaz as University of West Florida's seventh president. Chair Matthews is here to present the request for confirmation.

**Rebecca Matthews:**

Thank you and good morning. Thank you, Chair Levine, Vice Chair Cerio, Board of Governors, and Chancellor Rodrigues. It's great to be here today. Let me adjust my mic. As Chair of the University of West Florida Board of Trustees, it's a distinct privilege and honor to represent UWF and the Board of Trustees as you consider the confirmation and appointment of our seventh president. First, I'd like to extend my gratitude to the UWF Board of Trustees, the 15-member Presidential Search Committee led by Trustee Zach Smith, which also included Board of Governors presence, which was Chair Alan Levine. Thank you.

Additionally, Funk Associates was our executive search firm, along with a group of UWF professionals that supported the search and supportive counsel as well. So to each of you, your dedication to the process is most appreciated. On January 8th, as Chair Levine said just a few moments ago, the UWF Board of Trustees selected Manny Diaz, Jr. to serve as president-elect. This came at the conclusion of a thorough search process following Board of Governors Regulation 1.002. Since his appointment as interim president on July 14, 2025, President-elect Diaz has worked tirelessly to enhance the University of West Florida's experience for students, faculty, staff, and the community. His leadership has focused on elevating student and academic success, research, and strengthening the University's strategic partnerships across the state and beyond. From his first day on campus, Diaz has meaningfully engaged with all, earning trust and respect through his energy, accessibility, clear commitment to UWF's mission. The Presidential Search Committee and UWF Board of Trustees clearly saw these leadership qualities that have become apparent to all of us. President-elect Diaz is absolutely the catalyst UWF needs to accelerate its growth and national profile. His career reflects a rare ability to unite people, a skill refined through the years as a steady leader.

I've seen firsthand his genuine connection with students, thoughtful engagement with faculty, administrative staff, and enthusiasm for building these community partnerships. Those moments reveal both his heart for service and his vision for UWF's future. There are far too many examples to share today, but I will list just a few. Since his time, he's created the Military Services Office, which combines our Air Force and Army cadets with current active members and veterans. His enthusiastic embrace of our athletics and the University's brand, championing cyber security, robotics, engineering, business, research, archaeology, and state and federal affairs. Lots of advancements in all those areas in this short window of time.

As we look ahead, I'm confident that under President-elect Diaz's leadership, UWF will continue its trajectory of excellence, strengthening its reputation as a center for discovery, opportunity, and impact across the Gulf Coast and beyond. Your meeting materials include the appointment documents for President-elect Diaz in accordance to BOG regulation. The appointment was reviewed by the BOG General Counsel. And as reflected in the agreement, the President-elect's compensation is consistent with Search Committee's recommendation as approved by the Board of Trustees. If I may, I'll just take a few moments to highlight some of the agreement. First, the agreement is a five-year term commencing upon confirmation of the Board of Governors. Second, the agreement sets forth financial and key performance terms and includes annual performance bonus structure aligned with the university and the Board of Governors' performance strategic plans and accountability plan. And third, the goals of the President will be reviewed together jointly by the President and the Board, and the Board will approve. On behalf of the UWF Board of Trustees, it is a pleasure to submit our formal recommendation to the Board of Governors to confirm President-elect Diaz as our seventh president of the University of West Florida.

Thank you, and I look forward to working with you, my colleagues, the UWF Board, and the new president.

**Chair Levine:**

Thank you, Chair Matthews. Great explanation, and I will open it up if anybody—well, before I do that, let me just briefly discuss the process, and then I'd like to ask Governor Broxson to say a few words. You know, we went through this process. The search committee had a number of candidates that we reviewed. I'm saying this because I was on the search committee. This was the last search committee I'll serve on. The process was such that, you know, we had a lot of applicants. We went through a lot of process to narrow down the applicants for those that we felt were qualified and not qualified, and then we selected those that we wanted to interview. Went through an interview process, and it became apparent to me during the process, and this has been outlined in a letter from the Counsel to Brian Lamb, who was at the time Chair of the BOG, that there was a—it seemed infeasible to present more than two candidates by virtue of the fact that there was just a huge qualification chasm between the number one candidate, Manny, and the other candidates. And so that's why one candidate was presented. That candidate was approved by Governor Lamb as Chair. As you know, he has the right to veto or approve. Well, he approved it based on the circumstances, and it went to the Board of Trustees.

Each member of the Board of Trustees was briefed before, I guess, they had the public meeting, and then they had an interview process with President Diaz. So I'm sure there'll be some comments and questions about process in a minute, but, well, before we get to that, I'd like to ask Governor Broxson to say a few words, given that this university is in his backyard and he cares deeply about it. So, Governor?

**Douglas Broxson:**

Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is with some emotion that I am involved today in naming or recognizing President Diaz. My brother, in 1963, was in the Florida legislature and created the University of West Florida. And, as you know, universities lift the spirit of an area. For Northwest Florida, the University of West Florida represents a community that loves the university. I will tell you that, and you know this, and it's a hard process when you have a change in leadership in universities, and it could have been a very, very hard landing. I think President Diaz had a couple issues he had to deal with. One is he was a recovering politician, and the other, he was from Miami. I reminded him that the first word spoken in 1557 on the shores of Pensacola, which was not Pensacola, was in Spanish.

So he would have a 200-year welcome home party for him. There is a people that are uniquely gifted to meet challenges. I served with Manny in the legislature, with both the House and Senate, and his passion was education. Every major, difficult subject, he took on. And he expressed it in such ways that the members understood, and he would always bring it over the finish line. It was unique.

If you go back to the history of his family, of relocating here and knowing the perils of not having a free society, that's embedded deep in his system. There's no one that I know of that landed in Pensacola and went directly to the challenges of him being the new president. There was no group he would not meet with. There was no person that

had an ought against this concept that he did not meet. And he, by the force of his personality, took what could have been a very difficult situation and turned it into a positive for our area. And thank you for relocating your family, a beautiful family. You'll have to tell them the story of your family sometimes because your wife and her mother are just a part of your fabric of how you've been so successful. But you will do a great job because you are a hard worker, and you take any challenge and make it successful. So I know that there are a few people that will have lingering concerns, but it will happen, and you will be our next president. Thank you, sir.

**Chair Levine:**

Well said, Governor. We'll open it up if there's any questions by any members of the Board of Governors for the president or the chair. Governor Dunn.

**Kimberly Dunn:**

Thank you, Chair Levine. I appreciate the comments and the insights shared by my board colleagues. President Diaz, I watched your interview, and I want to thank you for your exemplary service to the system and to UWF. In the interview, I was very impressed by your vision, your commitment, and your leadership. And I believe that you have served and will continue to serve UWF well. Chair Matthews, my questions are really for you so that I can better understand your perspective on things. One could argue that selecting a university president is one of the most important, if not the most important duty of a board of trustees. And I'm really interested in your perspective. And from that, I have just two questions. First, as board chair, how did you satisfy yourself that the exceptional circumstances for submitting less than three candidates required by BOG Regulation 1.002 was met? And then my second question, during your deliberations at the BOT meeting, concerns about the process were raised. Can you help me understand your decision to move forward with the vote without additional discussion of those concerns? Thank you.

**Chair Levine:**

Madam Chair.

**Rebecca Matthews:**

Thank you. Appreciate that question, or the two questions. First, I was not on the committee, just to lay that out here for everybody to clarify things. But I did have access to Funk & Associates, our search firm, to receive frequent updates to the level that I needed in terms of the candidates that had applied. The larger pool that came in and where it was narrowed down to the candidates. So I was being briefed along the way to where I could feel comfortable with the process. And Funk & Associates has a 40-some-odd year track record of doing these types of searches. So I felt very comfortable with the gentleman and his team member that we worked with the most from those efforts. Then you fast-forward to the board meeting. I didn't have any concerns because clearly I was fine with what we were bringing forward that day to present to the board. And gave the entire board a similar packet to what you all received in terms of the background of President-elect Diaz and the process that had unfolded with the

community forums that we held in December, moving forward to that ultimate meeting in January. And none of those folks brought any questions to the table that day. So that's where we landed and brought him forward to the BOG. I hope that answers your question.

**Kimberly Dunn:**

Thank you for your response. Chair Levine, I just want to express that my faculty colleagues and I are increasingly concerned about presidential searches within our system that result in only one finalist, especially when that finalist is an internal candidate, and the impact of this decision on future searches and attracting the best possible talent. And so my vote today will reflect my concerns about this decision on future searches and not about President Diaz's qualifications. I do believe that he has served and will continue to serve well. And I look forward to seeing what he does at UWF.

**Chair Levine:**

Thank you, Governor Dunn. Any other questions for the chair or the interim president or president-designee?

**Anastasios Kamoutsas:**

Chair, I don't have a question but just a brief comment.

**Chair Levine:**

Sure.

**Anastasios Kamoutsas:**

I was uniquely situated to serve at the Florida Department of Education since March of 2019. I was able to be counsel to Richard Corcoran, eventually became his General Counsel. And when Manny Diaz was selected as the commissioner of education, I was actually the General Counsel and Chief of Staff to Manny until I eventually became the chief of staff. But I echo Governor Broxson's sentiments.

There is no one that is harder working. There is no one more humble. There is not a leader that I know who every day spoke to me about 10, 15 times a day wanting to know the intricacies of what was happening at the department, making sure that we were prioritizing student safety, academic achievement, ensuring that we were fighting for teacher pay, ensuring that our college system as a whole was moving in the right direction to be able to provide, you know, credentials and certifications in the industries where there was high demand to be able to get these kids into the workforce. And so he is a principled individual. He is a family man. He has a beautiful family. And we've been fortunate over the years to be able to get to know them. And I just think that, you know, it was a huge, huge downgrade, the commissioner that came after him. But we are trying to, you know, fill those major shoes because I know his impact and his legacy will be felt on this state for years to come. Thank you.

**Chair Levine:**

One last comment. First of all, I appreciate the comments from Governor Dunn. We had a very good conversation this morning with the ACFS faculty that took the time to come and share ideas with us. There were things we agreed on. There were things we didn't agree on. But it was a really good civil conversation. And I look forward to continuing to get the input from the faculty as we try to make our process as good as it can be. With that, I'm going to call for a motion for the confirmation of Manny Diaz as the president of the University of West Florida. Doug Broxson, would you like to make the motion? Governor Broxson moves.

**Aubrey Edge:**

Second.

**Chair Levine:**

We've got a second from Governor Edge. Any comments? If not, all those in favor, please say aye.

**Group:**

Aye.

**Chair Levine:**

Any opposed, no?

**Kimberly Dunn:**

No.

**Chair Levine:**

Congratulations. Mr. President, would you like to say a few words? Still a recovering politician, so always going to take the mic.

**Manny Diaz:**

Well, first of all, I'd like to thank the Board of Governors for the work you do. Having the privilege to serve on this board for almost three years as commissioner, I saw firsthand the impact that this body can have on education in Florida and on the lives of our young people and those who are returning to try to gain skills to be part of our economy and really our way of life here in Florida. So I thank you for your service. I know sometimes it can be difficult. And again, I thank you for your confidence and support in this endeavor. Thank you, Governor Broxson, for those kind words.

And thank you, Chair Levine, for possibly making the last search you serve on mine. So I appreciate that. I'd also like to thank our Board of Trustees at the University of West Florida and, again, the work that they do every day to support our students, to support our community. These positions, unpaid voluntary positions, take up a lot of time and effort, and you really have to be invested in the work you're doing for our students. And I

think it's going to have an impact on the community, on the northwest Florida region, but our entire state. And so I thank you for the confidence placed in me.

I thank those members of the search committee that served and took the time to go through this process. It is an incredible honor to be able to serve as the seventh president of the University of West Florida. I would also take a moment to thank my wife, my daughters, my mother-in-law, who are here today. They have been incredibly supportive, and I would not have been able to serve in the legislature, in the House and Senate, or as commissioner of education without their support. So I'm very happy to have them here today for this moment. This honor comes with a great responsibility, and I took the position as interim president in July with a great sense of urgency, twofold.

Number one, establishing myself in that community, having the conversations with those folks, whether they had a doubt or they didn't. I wanted them to get a full understanding of what my vision is, what my dedication is, and my commitment to education over the last 30 years. There's such incredible potential at the University of West Florida. Incredible achievements have occurred already, but when you walk into a place with a fresh set of eyes, you see opportunity. And I think we are, and my team will probably confirm this, we have a lot of irons in the fire, and I wake up every day with a great sense of urgency to improve, because time goes by very quickly, and we don't have any time to wait. We have to move in a positive direction.

Again, I spent my entire career in education starting as a classroom teacher, going into higher ed and serving in the legislature, having the fortune to serve as chairman of several education committees, educational approps committees in the House and Senate, and then having the distinct honor to serve as the commissioner of education for the great state of Florida. I saw firsthand from the classroom, from policymaking, and as commissioner, the impact that this service that we have, that we take, that all of us are doing here, have on the lives of individuals in our state. And I take that same commitment into this position as the president of the University of West Florida. I believe that every decision that we make, just as I did as I served on this Board of Governors, has to start with students first. That is the business we are in. Those are the people that we serve. And if you start with that as your compass, as your North Star, the decisions become much easier as you go through them. And we will continue to make our decisions based on what's best for students. All of that will play out in a better economy, better citizens, and a better state.

And so I think my challenge and the challenge to my team is to continue to move the University of West Florida forward, to continue to exhaust every option that we have to show daily improvement for our students, not just in the classroom, that's very important, but also in the activities and engagement they have on our campus, and how our institution can be part of the local and regional economy in helping bring new jobs to Northwest Florida and to the state of Florida.

And I do that by waking up every day, striving to improve on all of those factors. So I'm excited about the future of the University of West Florida. I'm incredibly excited about our state university system.

I am very fortunate to have a group of colleagues and the 11 other presidents that are incredible to work with, that do a great job every day. And then when you pick up the phone and call them and ask questions, they're there. And so I appreciate that. I've received a lot of advice, a lot of help, and I've been able to bounce ideas off each and every one of you. I also am excited about the current members, the new members, and the members who have been on the Board of Governors, and I look forward to continuing our work together. I am very excited by your state of the university system speech, Mr. Chair. I think that Florida will continue to head in the right direction. We've been number one for a decade. That's no coincidence, as you mentioned, but we can't rest on our laurels, and it takes every one of our 12 institutions and this board to continue to do that. So thank you very much for that.

Chancellor, I've enjoyed working with you together as we as we brought the two systems together from day one, the state college system and the State University System as a whole. And I will continue to enjoy working with you as we go forward in this new capacity. Thank you for your leadership. Florida has got a bright future, and we will continue to push forward. So with that, thank you very much again for the support, for the confidence, and go Argos.

**Chair Levine:**

It is indeed great to see good things happen to good people, so congratulations, Manny. All right. We're now going to move on to the next agenda item, the proposed amendments to the board operating procedures. You all have the red line and clean copy draft of the revisions to the board operating procedures in your meeting materials, which were publicly posted before this meeting. The highlights include, number one, clarifying that the board has the ability to create or remove standing committees while the board chair may appoint ad hoc committees or task forces. This is just basically matching the language to what our practice has been. Updating some of the committee language to align with current practices and the direction moving forward. As I talked about, there's some changes to some of the committees and the titles to some of the committees, and I suspect there will be some recommended changes to one or two of them in a minute. Creating a new standing committee, the Student Safety and Success Committee, which will be charged with focusing on issues related to campus safety, student well-being, student success, and retention. If approved, these amendments would also require that the vice chair of this committee be the sitting student member of the board. It reconstitutes the Academic and Research Excellence Committee to focus on university research and innovation, as well as enhancing universities' opportunities to contribute to Florida's economic health. While we're on this topic, I'd like to propose that instead of naming this committee the Innovation, Research, and Economic Development Committee, that we instead name it the Academic Excellence and Economic Prosperity Committee.

When I call for a motion in just a bit, I'd ask that that change be considered. And finally, the amendments also include removing the Innovation Online Committee, whose work has been subsumed by other committees. Do I have a motion to approve the revisions to the board operating procedures, including renaming the Academic and Research Excellence Committee to the Academic Excellence and Economic Prosperity Committee?

**Ken Jones:**

So moved, Jones.

**Chair Levine:**

Jones moves.

**Timothy Cerio:**

Second.

**Chair Levine:**

Cerio seconds. Is there any discussion?

**Kimberly Dunn:**

I would like to offer two amendments. The first, I love everything you've done. My amendment is to clarify some language. In the Academic Affairs Committee, six lines from the bottom, I recommend the insertion of and approval of the elimination. So it currently says, and the elimination of programs. I would like to suggest approval of the elimination of programs, which is consistent with what we do in practice. So I offer that as my first amendment.

**Chair Levine:**

I would accept that as a friendly amendment, if the person who moved.

**Ken Jones:**

I would defer to our General Counsel. Does that change the legal intent of what we are trying to accomplish, if we have approval of versus just the elimination of? Does that require a affirmative vote, then, every time we wanted to do something that streamlined or made the elimination of something, we'd have to bring it back to do an approval as well by a vote? Is that correct?

**Amanda Gay:**

This just establishes the purposes of the committee. So if there's any, I think I'm getting your question right. So when it talks about elimination of programs, that would be based on regulation. So this is just defining the purposes of the committee.

**Chair Levine:**

So I think that it's a distinction without a difference because we don't, the committee doesn't unilaterally step in and eliminate programs. There's typically a process, and so the committee typically approves of the elimination. So if the Chancellor says, you know, whatever the process is for consideration of elimination of programs, the Chancellor brings it to the board, we act through the approval of that. So I think, I don't want to put words in your mouth, but I think the concern was by not having approval of in the language, it appears that we can, the committee can just come here one day and eliminate programs. And I don't think that's typically how we've done it.

**Ken Jones:**

Is that what you're trying to do?

**Kimberly Dunn:**

Yes, please.

**Ken Jones:**

No, I don't have any objection.

**Amanda Gay:**

Okay, so we have a motion on the floor and then a motion to amend that. We need a second for that motion to amend.

**Kimberly Dunn:**

Do you want me to make the other one?

**Chair Levine:**

Yeah, go ahead and do that one too.

**Kimberly Dunn:**

Okay. The other one, I love the student safety and success committee. I think campus safety and student success might more accurately capture your intent.

**Chair Levine:**

Agreed.

**Kimberly Dunn:**

So that would be my recommendation.

**Ken Jones:**

No objection.

**Chair Levine:**

So he's accepted as a friendly amendment.

**Amanda Gay:**

Okay, so we can take that as we have our initial motion to amend the board operating procedures, which is improperly seconded. We have a motion to amend that motion with the clarification adding approval of the elimination. And the second is to rename it to be campus safety and student success. We need a second for that. And Jones will second.

**Ken Jones:**

Second.

**Chair Levine:**

So we have to vote on the amendments and then the final. Okay. Any comments about the amendments?

**Ken Jones:**

Motion to approve.

**Chair Levine:**

Move to approve the amendments... Second?

**Kimberly Dunn:**

Second.

**Chair Levine:**

Second. Done. Okay. Any discussion? If none, all those in favor say aye.

**Group:**

Aye.

**Chair Levine:**

Any opposed, no. Okay. Now we're on to the full motion as amended. We have a motion and a second. Any more discussion. If none, all in favor say aye?

**Group:**

Aye.

**Chair Levine:**

We're good. All right. CPHE update. Oh, that's me. Okay. As this board requested, we have Dr. Jason Jewell here to present an update on the activities of the Commission for Public Higher Education since our last board meeting. Dr. Jewell?

**Jason Jewell:**

Thank you, Chair Levine. Thank you, Chair Levine. I have several items to share concerning CPHE's progress since the last BOG meeting in November. And I'll begin with the good news that CPHE now has an extra million dollars in the bank that we were not expecting to have last fall. On November 12th, the U.S. Department of Education made a surprise announcement that it was making grant opportunities available for special projects through the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education, and the acronym is FIPSE, including up to \$7 million for projects related to accreditation reform. The department invited new accreditors to apply for funding to build administrative capacity as they are preparing to seek recognition from the department. And the window for applications was only three weeks. So after getting the board's approval, CPHE staff basically dropped everything and put together an application for a million dollars, which was the maximum permitted by the grant guidelines.

We submitted that application at the beginning of December and were notified on December 31st that we had been awarded the \$1 million we had requested. And this grant will enable CPHE to reduce the amount of funding it is requesting from the BOG Foundation for the next fiscal year. In other areas, CPHE is continuing to make progress in line with our expectations.

In December, we received confirmation from the IRS that our 501c3 status had been approved, and the staff has produced a draft of an evidentiary guidance document that will help our applicants understand how to meet the accrediting standards we approved last year. And just yesterday, our staff met with a policy and procedures workgroup to get feedback on that evidentiary guidance document. We're in final revisions for that now before we send it out to the 10 institutions that have sent us letters of intent. My counterparts who represent the other five founding university systems on the board of directors are currently in conversation with their system heads and legislatures about financial contributions to support CPHE's startup costs. We expect updates from each of them on their progress at our next board meeting, which is scheduled for February. And finally, on Tuesday of this week, the U.S. Department of Education announced its intent to conduct negotiated rulemaking to reform its regulations on accreditation. And obviously, CPHE will be watching this process closely to learn how any potential regulatory changes might affect our path to recognition by the department. Undersecretary of Education Nicholas Kent has repeatedly expressed his desire in public to make the recognition process less burdensome for new accreditors. So at this point, we do not expect any of the changes that might result from the negotiated rulemaking to impede our progress. So that concludes my information update on CPHE. I'm happy to answer any questions you have. Thank you.

**Chair Levine:**

Thank you. Thank you, Dr. Jewell. Any questions of Dr. Jewell? If none, thank you. Thank you very much. Okay, finally, we have up for consideration the approval of the University of South Florida Health Sciences Center Insurance Company's amended and restated bylaws. Amanda, will you please present the item?

**Amanda Gay:**

Thank you, Chair Levine. The Board of Governors Regulation 10.001 authorizes self-insurance programs for the purpose of providing comprehensive general liability and professional liability insurance. Each self-insurance program is administered by a council, and captive insurance companies exist to provide that protection as authorized by Florida statutes. Our regulation defines the members of the Board of Directors for the insurance companies. An amendment is being proposed to the USF Health Sciences Center Insurance Company's bylaws. The first is to allow directors to designate an alternate director to the extent it's permitted by our regulation, and the second is to allow for the appointment of a vice president who can act in the event of incapacity of the president. These changes are being submitted for approval due to our Board regulation.

**Chair Levine:**

Any questions of Amanda or Vice Chair Griffin? If none, is there a motion?

**Ken Jones:**

So moved.

**Chair Levine:**

Got a motion. Jones?

**Kimberly Dunn:**

Second

**Chair Levine:**

Second. Dunn? Second. Any discussion? If none, all those in favor say aye.

**Group:**

Aye.

**Chair Levine:**

Any opposed, no. Okay, show that adopted. All right, consent agenda. Before we get to the Board of Governors Foundation meeting, which will be very short, we have one more action item for the full board, which is our consent agenda. In the interest of expediency, all the action items coming forward from the committees have been placed on the consent agenda. As you know, Governor Dale has requested that the notice of intent to amend regulation 1.001 be removed from the consent agenda, so we will first take up the approval of the consent agenda with that item removed, and then we'll take up the other item as a separate action. Is there a motion to approve the items on the consent agenda, excluding the notice of intent to amend 1.001?

**Ken Jones:**

So moved.

**Chair Levine:**

So moved. Jones? Second.

**Aubrey Edge:**

Second.

**Kimberly Dunn:**

Second.

**Chair Levine:**

Second, Edge. Any discussion? If none, all those say aye.

**Group:**

Aye.

**Chair Levine:**

Any opposed, no. All right, show that adopted. Now we're on to the notice of intent to amend 1.001. Is there a motion?

**Timothy Cerio:**

Moved.

**Ken Jones:**

So moved

**Chair Levine:**

We've got a motion to approve. Jones seconds. Any discussion? All those in, do you want to do a, I guess we'll, all those in favor, please signify by saying aye.

**Group:**

Aye.

**Chair Levine:**

Any opposed?

**Governors Dale and Dunn:**

Aye.

**Chair Levine:**

There you go. Okay. All right. And with that, I will now adjourn the full board meeting, but we have one more board we have to do the Foundation Board meeting really quick.