

TO: The Eastern Kentucky University Faculty Senate
FROM: Senator Michael T. Benson
DATE: November 1, 2017
RE: November Campus Report

At the time of writing this report, I am preparing to attend a CPE Board meeting in Elizabethtown at which the budget will be presented. Without going into specifics about numbers, I can tell you that we have finally reached consensus among Kentucky's public universities as to what our priorities are for the upcoming session: pension relief, capital resources and asset preservation, performance funding, and workforce development and job creation. I will be happy to discuss each in greater detail with you at the meeting on Monday.

As it relates to the pension issue, the comprehensive institutions are specifically requesting budgetary relief from the inevitable increases which will be passed along to each campus in the coming months.

The full legislative draft of Governor Bevin and legislative leadership's public pension reform bill was released to the public late Friday evening. All members of the House and Senate, along with the public, now have the legislation to review (see links below). One key component still remaining is an actuarial and financial analysis of how the system will be paid for in the years to come, as well as a financial analysis of how the proposal will affect employee retirements. Much of the public discussion since the framework was released has been around the proposal's impact on K-12 and specifically teachers, both those currently in the system and new hires. There will also be significant impacts to our university communities and other state agencies. We have reached out and continue to have good dialogue with both the executive branch and legislative leadership concerning the impact of the bill on our institution.

The Governor and legislative leadership continue to state that a special legislative session will take place "soon," but a date has not been set publicly. They continue to be committed to holding a special session prior to the January 2, 2018, regular session to address only the public pension crisis. The minimum number of days needed to pass legislation through both chambers is five. There will be no emergency clause in the final bill, meaning that any changes to the pension plans will be in effect on July 1, 2018, the first date of the next fiscal biennium.

A special called meeting of the Public Pension Oversight Board (PPOB) is scheduled for Thursday at 1:00 pm (ET) in Capitol Annex Room 154, where the Governor's Budget Director is expected to review the major provisions of the bill. A prior meeting of the PPOB filled four committee rooms with attendees, so visitors are encouraged to arrive early if they intend to sit in the live committee room. We will continue to monitor the media, public appearances, and legislative hearings to obtain the latest and most up-to-date information on the proposal and provide that to the campus community.

Some helpful links to various documents highlighting the recently-released pension bill are included here:

[Pension Reform Draft \(505 Pages\)](#)

[Section by Section](#)

[Side by Side Comparison](#)

I can promise you that we will work tirelessly on behalf of higher education generally and Eastern Kentucky University specifically during this session. David McFaddin is the convener of the legislative representatives for all public institutions, and I am the convener of the presidents, so EKV is very well represented as we help push our agenda forward. We anticipate having our elected officials visit campus in the next few weeks for an open forum; more details will be forthcoming.

Campus Updates

If you ever wonder about your impact on students, you should join us at most any alumni event, particularly the annual alumni awards banquet, which is held every Homecoming and Reunion Weekend.

The banquet honors some of our most distinguished alumni – women and men from a variety of fields and eras who have left their mark in their places of work, their professions and their communities. But there is always one common thread among any such group of honorees: their lives were enriched by EKV faculty, maybe at a time when, as students, they weren't too confident about their own future. And these grateful alumni love to talk about that special professor who went out of his or her way to take a personal interest in their academic and personal growth. I can't say it enough: our work – your work – matters. It changes lives and even entire communities.

In the case of one of our faculty members, it is inspiring not just EKV students but an entire nation. Dr. Faridah Awang, an award-winning professor in our School of Business, is the very first Malaysian-American to earn a full professorship in her academic field in the U.S. Her incredible rise from childhood poverty to the pinnacle of her profession is chronicled in Dr. Awang's autobiography, which is a big hit in her native country and is being made into a movie.

So revered is the work of another of our faculty members that he was recently honored on the floor of the U.S. Senate. Majority Leader Mitch McConnell called Dr. Tom Appleton, who is retiring at the end of this academic year, "one of Kentucky's premier historians" and said he had "made a lasting impact on the next generation with his teaching." A group of us met with Senator McConnell in Washington the day before he made his remarks on the floor of the U.S. Senate and he was effusive in his praise of the Professor's contributions. We're eagerly awaiting Dr. Appleton's next work, a biography of legendary Kentuckian Albert B. "Happy" Chandler.

Our heroes also include the many men and women who have gone on from Eastern to serve our nation in military service, some paying the ultimate sacrifice. We'll pause on Saturday, November 11, to honor all these brave Colonels and all veterans with a Veterans Day ceremony at Memorial Plaza that will also include the unveiling of a Fallen Soldier Cross sculpture dedicated to all those who lost their lives because of their service, but not while serving. The previous day, Friday, November 10, the University community will participate in the National Roll Call, during which approximately 7,000 names will be read to honor those service members lost in recent military conflicts. I am proud to serve an institution that boasts such a proud legacy of military service.

I am also proud that Eastern is home to a thriving community of more and more Latino students and that we are one of the few universities outside the coasts or the American southwest with two Latino Regents. Lewis Diaz and Juan Castro were both on campus recently to share their strategies for success with students, and Regent Castro was back a few days later as we dedicated the Bobby Verdugo Bilingual Peer Mentoring and Tutoring Center in McCreary Hall. The revered Chicano civil rights activist was on campus for the occasion and will return next year to deliver our keynote address for Latino Heritage Month.

One faculty member instrumental in the establishment of the center, Dr. Socorro Zaragoza, was one of 19 faculty members from across Kentucky to graduate last week from the very first cohort of the Council on Postsecondary Education's Academic Leadership Development Institute. For the past year, Dr. Zaragoza, associate professor in our Department of Languages, Cultures and Humanities, and her fellow educators participated in workshops that addressed the state of affairs in postsecondary education – changing campus demographics, achievement haps, legislation and higher education, performance funding and high-impact educational practices that support student success.

Congratulations as well to five ECU faculty members among 41 statewide who recently completed the fourth annual Bluegrass Academic Leadership Academy. The ECU Fellows are Ida Kumoji-Ankrah, chair, Department of Art and Design; Karen Maloley, chair, Department of Curriculum and Instruction; Dawn L. Rothe, chair, Department of Criminal Justice and Police Studies; Michael Walach, associate professor, Department of Applied Engineering and Technology; and Kelly Watson, associate professor, Department of Geosciences.

Finally, next month we anticipate a positive vote to reaffirm ECU's accreditation at the annual SACSCOC meeting in Dallas, Texas. Many people worked very, very hard to prepare for the on-site visit last February, and recent events at other institutions have underscored just how important accreditation is to institutions. I thank all who helped make this process run so smoothly for Eastern.

Thanks very much for your continued service to ECU and our students.