

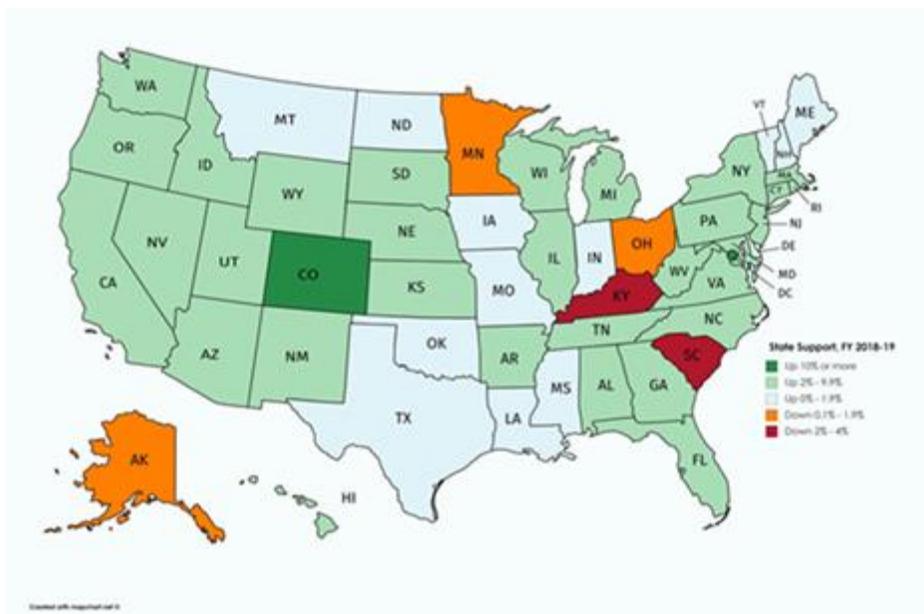
TO: The Eastern Kentucky University Faculty Senate  
FROM: Senator Michael T. Benson  
DATE: 1 February 2019  
RE: February Report

I hope the first weeks of the spring semester are off to a great start for each of you. We all survived the “polar vortex” and we are just over a month away from Spring Break regardless of what Punxsutawney Phil saw this weekend. I encourage you to review [the note to faculty and staff](#) Provost Jerry Pogatshnik sent out Thursday relative to the campus closure on Wednesday and our decision to be open on Thursday.

The new year also ushers in new leadership for our Board of Regents. We recently welcomed Mr. Lewis Diaz as the Chair of the Board. A few weeks ago, he communicated to campus some of his goals and we are grateful for his commitment to his alma mater and his desire to see the institution move forward. We also welcome a new board member, EKU alumna Lynn Taylor Tye of Danville, to the Board of Regents. She will be sworn in as a new member of the Board later this month.

In a time of year when we focus on forecasts and how we might have to adjust our daily routines to accommodate what the atmosphere hands us, I wish I could report a brighter outlook for funding for higher education in Kentucky, but challenges will likely remain.

We continue to grapple with reductions in our base budget, the new performance-based funding formula, fewer Kentucky high school graduates feeding into the higher education pipeline, and unprecedented pension obligations. [A recent article posted by Inside Higher Ed](#) noted that Kentucky is one of two states in which the funding of higher education is down two to four percent, despite the upward trajectory of funding for higher education across most states.



In [a recent KET interview](#) with Renee Shaw I had an opportunity to discuss how an investment in higher education benefits not only the individual, but also our society as a whole. It was a welcomed occasion to highlight all the milestones we have accomplished in recent years and outline work still ahead.

The unenviable challenge of our pension obligation will take a sharp increase in the next fiscal year. I can assure you pension reform is ECU's top legislative priority as the Commonwealth's pension crisis continues to threaten our ability to provide opportunity to future generations of Kentuckians. The legislature has formed a bipartisan Public Pensions Working Group tasked with offering recommendations to the General Assembly later this month.

Dr. David McFaddin and the Office of Government Relations have a daily presence in this session to represent and promote ECU. Your participation in the legislative process is always welcome and encouraged. If you schedule meetings with policymakers or government officials while representing your official role with ECU, we kindly ask you to work with ECU's Director of Government & Community Relations [Ethan Witt](#) as he is very willing and able to assist.

In addition to our Government Relations team, we have several "Colonels in the Capitol" with new assignments. Representative Deanna Frazier (R-81) was elected to the Kentucky General Assembly and her district includes ECU's Richmond campus. She is an alumna and adjunct faculty member in the College of Education's Communication Disorders Program.

ECU graduate Rep. John "Bam" Carney (R-51) was elected Majority Floor Leader of the House of Representatives. He previously chaired the House Education Committee and has served nine years in the state legislature.

Whether they are serving in our capitol, or our local communities, we must not lose sight of the difference ECU graduates are making for the Commonwealth. This was particularly evident in one of our recent December commencement speakers, Marti Burton. Marti proudly protects and serves ECU as a detective with the police department. She has been assigned to stand watch at many graduations, but was yet to walk across that stage herself after starting and stopping her studies over the course of two decades. The pride she exuded as her college's selected commencement speaker while recognizing her two daughters was palpable, and a poignant example of how an entire family's trajectory is altered by educational attainment.

December's ceremonies were especially memorable as I cannot recall hearing any better speeches than those from the students selected to address their fellow graduates and all the assembled guests. They were all incredibly inspiring and I left each of the three ceremonies uplifted, encouraged, and motivated to do better and to be better. Thanks to all who participated.

As always, I am grateful for your continued service to our students and community.